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THE UTOPIAN DREAMS THAT UNITED THE DICTATORS

HISTORY MAGAZINE

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INSIDE THE VIKING MIND

From warfare to the supernatural, how the Norse raiders saw their world

REGENCY HELL SHOCKING POVERTY IN THE AGE OF AUSTEN

How the White Ship disaster plunged medieval England into anarchy

ALISON WEIR ON CRUSADER QUEENS

Colonial secrets of stately homes The hidden history of Britain's mansions

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BBC HISTORY MAGAZINE

DECEMBER 2020

It seems barely a week goes by these days without a new **Viking** discovery being announced. And the more we learn about these people, the deeper our understanding grows about their world and their behaviour – although, of course, scholarly disagreements remain. In this month's cover feature, on page 50, Neil Price draws on the latest thinking to examine the **Viking psyche**, exploring everything from gender identities to magic and warfare.

Another theme we're covering in depth this month is **medieval monarchy**. On page 37 you'll find a conversation between Dan Jones and Charles Spencer about the **White Ship disaster**, which famously left Henry I without a legitimate male heir. The result was almost two decades of the Anarchy, which saw Henry's daughter, Matilda, battling her cousin Stephen for the throne. And life as a **royal woman** didn't get much easier in the centuries that followed, as Alison Weir reveals in her piece on page 60, which considers the experiences of five queen-consorts in the age of the Crusades.

Still on the subject of medieval royals, you might recall that the fate of the **princes in the Tower** was voted History's Greatest Mystery in a reader poll we conducted earlier this year. Well, we recently launched a **podcast series** investigating their 1483 disappearance, and all eight episodes are now available at *historyextra.com/princes*. Has the mystery finally been solved? You'll have to listen to find out!

Rob Attar
Editor

THIS ISSUE'S CONTRIBUTORS

Laurence Rees
I've spent the last 30 years making TV documentaries and writing books about the Third Reich, Stalinism and the Second World War, and I'm intrigued by the similarities and differences between Hitler and Stalin.
Laurence explores the tyrants' twisted dreams about utopia **on page 22**

Corinne Fowler
Country houses are central to the image of Britain's rural idyll, yet I've long wanted to draw greater attention to their links to the British empire. That's why I'm heading the national education and public history project Colonial Countryside.
Corinne reveals the web of colonial connections linked to stately homes **on page 44**

Ian Mortimer
Until writing *The Time Traveller's Guide to Regency Britain*, I had never properly understood the depth of misery of the working classes during the industrial revolution – or how great the contrast was with the rich.
Ian charts the vast disparity between Regency Britain's rich and poor **on page 66**

MORE FROM US

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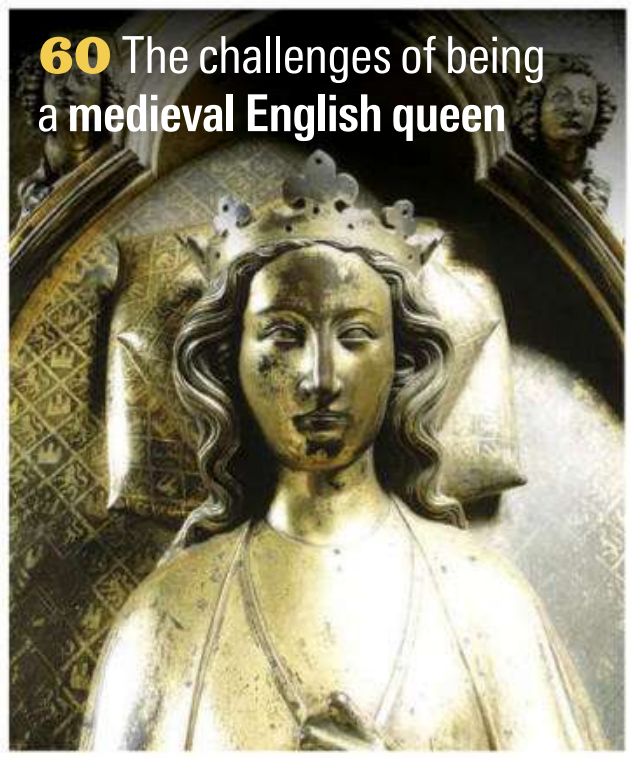

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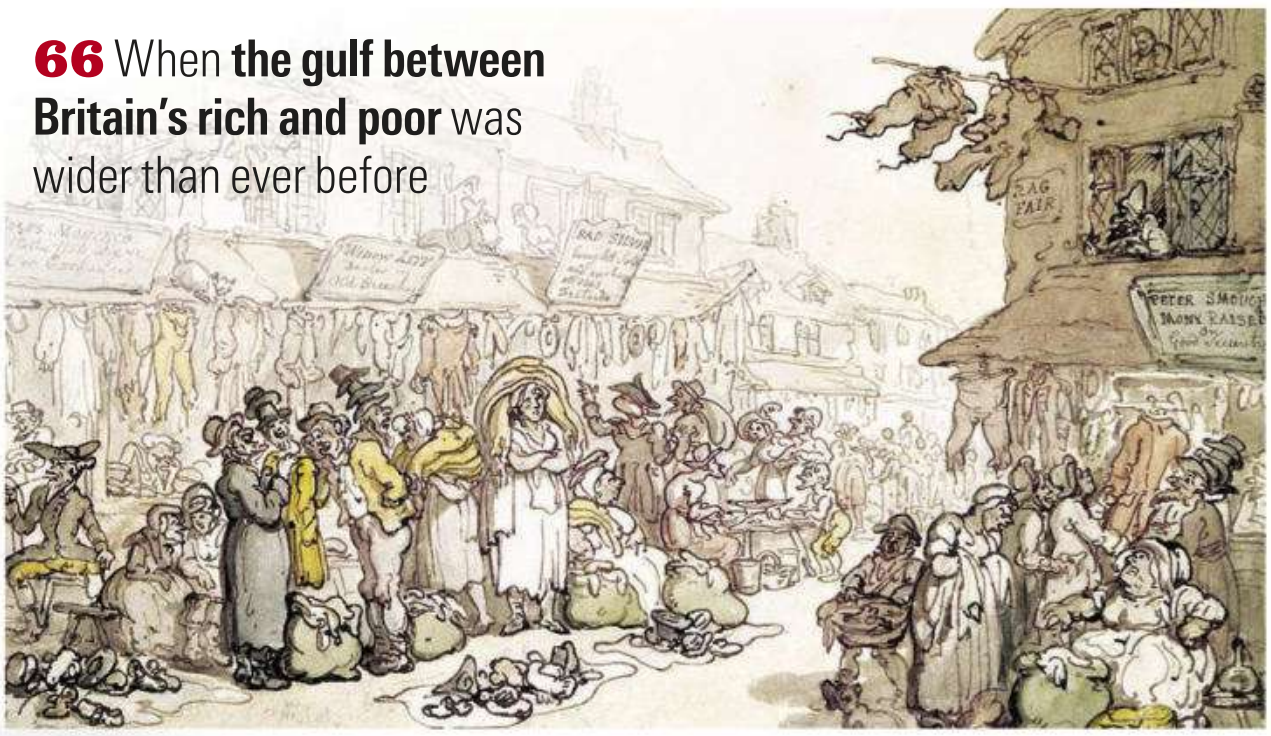

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ADVERTISEMENT FEATURE

The gift of freedom

THE BRITISH RED CROSS GIVES HUNDREDS OF PEOPLE A BETTER QUALITY OF LIFE – AND YOU CAN BECOME A PART OF ITS LEGACY

This year, things have been a little different. We've had to spend long periods of time away from family and friends, and naturally, this has left many of us suffering from feelings of loneliness and uncertainty. But, if there's one thing we can be thankful for, it's that this situation is only temporary. Sadly, for people like 26-year-old Rebecca, these feelings won't just disappear. As someone who suffers from fibromyalgia, which causes pain and extreme tiredness, her physical discomfort can take a toll on her mental wellbeing. Aside from dealing with the fatigue, she also suffers from memory loss and mood swings, along with persistent back pain. Two years ago, this became so severe she was unable to stand for more than a few minutes at a time.

As she didn't qualify for a wheelchair through the NHS, Rebecca was effectively trapped in her own home. Unable to leave her house to see loved ones, or even go outside for a walk, she was left feeling isolated. "I couldn't get out, so there was a sense of loneliness that came with the physical pain," she says. "I wasted about a year housebound."

Things changed for the better when she got in touch with the Red Cross, who provided her with the wheelchair she needed. Thanks to its help, Rebecca regained her freedom, and claimed back her life. Empowered by her newfound independence, she was even able to help others in a similar position. "I ran a big mental health event in Belfast – all because the chair allowed me to," she explains.

The Red Cross not only provides practical aid such as mobility equipment and access to medicine, but also offers emotional support and advice. So, if you're in need of a little help, you can rest assured that help is never too far away.

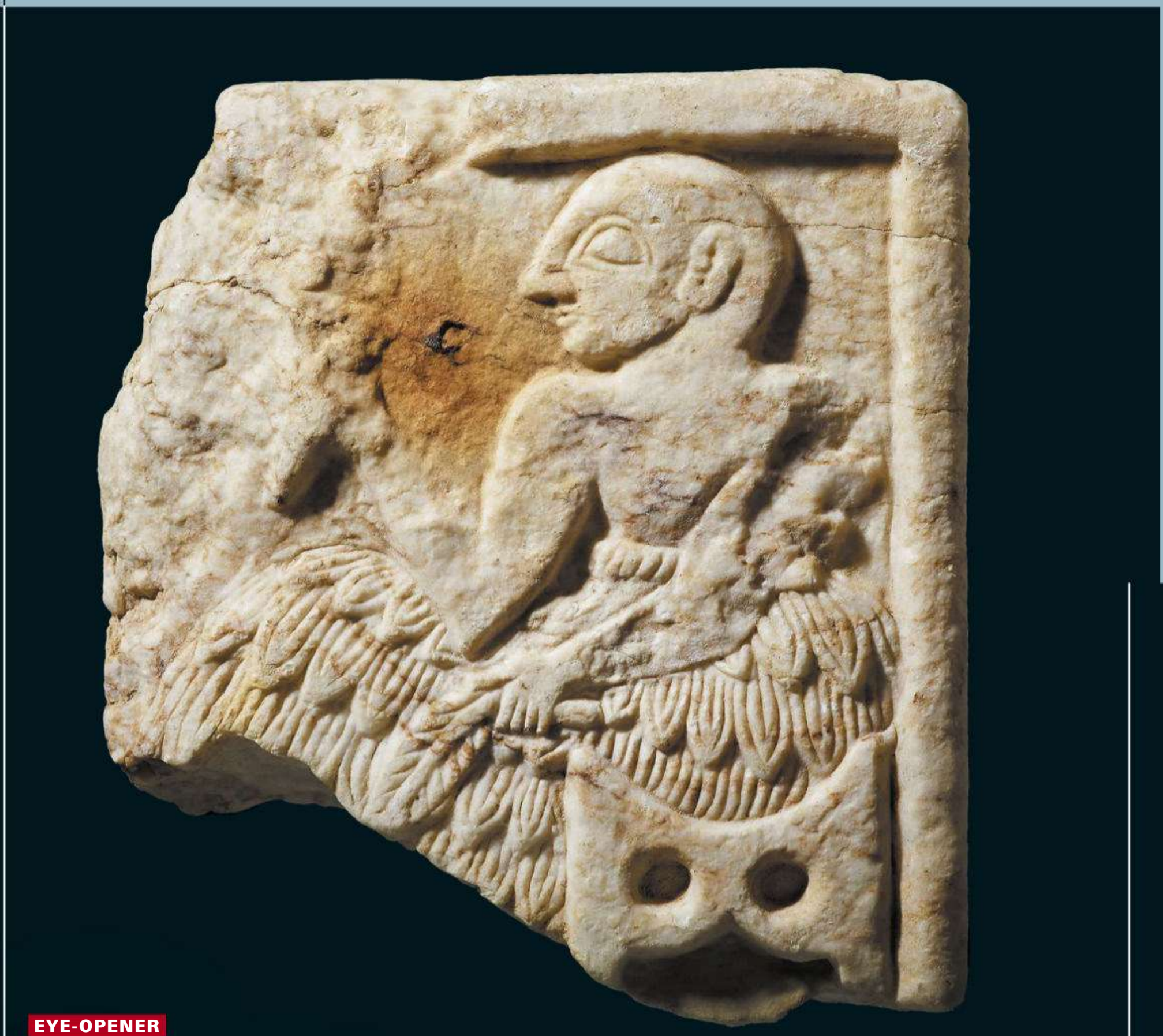
A LASTING IMPACT

We don't realise how much we value our freedom, until it's taken away. Only through the generosity of its supporters can the Red Cross help people like Rebecca regain their independence. By leaving a gift in your will, you can make a lasting impact and ensure this vital charity can continue to make lives better for years to come.

For more information about supporting the British Red Cross with a gift in your will and the Free Will scheme, visit redcross.org.uk/freewill or call 0300 500 0401

BritishRedCross

THIS MONTH IN HISTORY



THE TRUSTEES OF THE BRITISH MUSEUM

EYE-OPENER

Heading home

This ancient limestone plaque, crafted in Mesopotamia in the third millennium BC, is set to be returned to Iraq after having been smuggled out of the country and offered for sale in Britain.

Dating from around 2400 BC, the plaque originates from a Sumerian temple and depicts a figure with a ceremonial goblet in its raised right hand. Because it's one of only about 50 known examples of its kind, its scarcity made it an ideal target for illicit trade. The plaque was intended to be put up for online auction in May 2019, but it was instead seized by the arts and antiques unit of the Metropolitan Police, which has been working with experts from the British Museum to return it to its place of origin.

Have a story? Please email Matt Elton at matt.elton@immediate.co.uk

TALKING POINTS

Write here, write now

The events of 2020 will be a rich subject for future historians – but, Twitter wondered, how did scholars make sense of the upheavals of their own eras? **ANNA WHITELOCK** followed the discussion

Public historian **Greg Jenner** (@greg_jenner) challenged Twitter with a really interesting question that he had been asked by a friend: "Were any popular histories of major wars and/or catastrophes written while the war [or] catastrophe was still ongoing and the outcome unknown?"

It was a thought-provoking question, and one that produced a rich variety of responses. **Dr Sara Barker** (@DrSKBarker) was quick off the blocks, saying: "Several histories of the [16th-century] French Wars of Religion were composed as they were still ongoing – but those wars were so fragmented, no one quite knew how or when they might end." **Dr Rachel Gibbons** (@rachel_gibbons) suggested "Jean Froissart's chronicle of the 14th-century phases of the Hundred Years' War," while **Graeme Millen** (@Weegie_Graeme) noted, interestingly, that "Colonel Robert [Monro's] memoir of a Scottish Regiment during the Thirty Years' War didn't have a hugely successful print run, but it was fairly influential on 17th-century military memoirists and published while the war was ongoing. It may also have been the first regimental history."

Clare Stansfield (@StansfieldClare) jumped forward several centuries to the tail-end of the Victorian era. "Arthur Conan Doyle wrote *The Great Boer War* during the Boer War," she tweeted. "The first edition was in 1900, and he then revised it while the war was ongoing." **Sean Lang** (@sf_lang), meanwhile, wrote he was "pretty sure there were newspaper-sponsored histories of the First World War published as it went on. There were definitely children's histories of it published."

Join the debate at **twitter.com/historyextra**

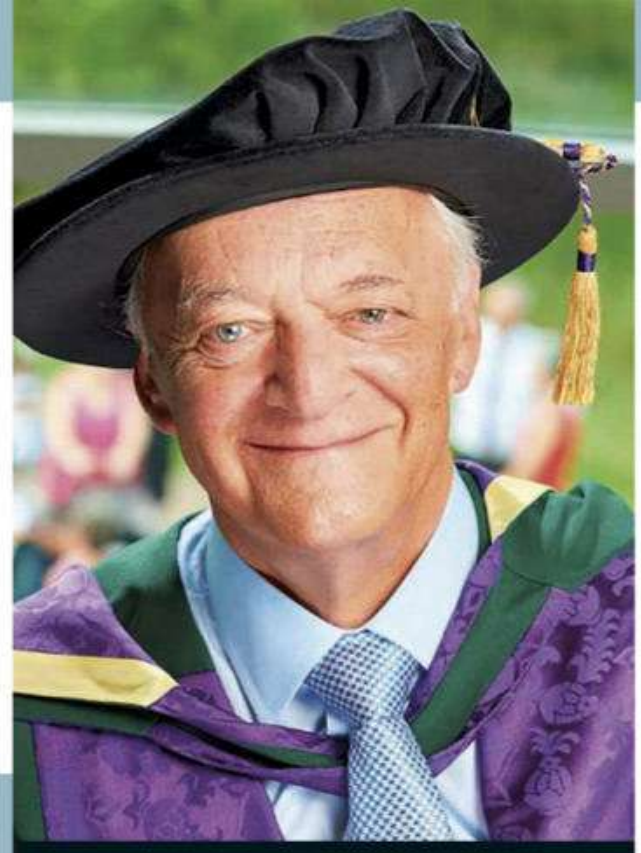
Nicky Brunger Crafts (@nbrunger) wrote: "George Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia* was published in 1938, before the end of the Spanish Civil War," and **Ned Richardson-Little** (@HistoryNed) pointed out that "[French historian] Marc Bloch wrote *Strange Defeat* about the fall of France right after it happened, but it wasn't published until 1946 – two years after Bloch had been executed by the Gestapo for being part of the resistance."

David Morgan (@Elitism) looked across the Atlantic to the United States. "Published in 1965, David Halberstam's *The Making of a Quagmire* was the story of how the US got involved in the Vietnam War," he wrote, and "the 'Pentagon Papers' (leaked in 1971) were a secret official Department of Defense history of the war." **Mike Shapiro** (@Mike_Shapiro) pointed out that "[Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward's 1974 book] *All the President's Men* was published before Watergate came to its conclusion".

The responses to Greg Jenner's query provide more evidence, if it was needed, that Twitter isn't always dominated by rancorous debate. Why not tweet your own query and see if you can generate an equally rich discussion? H

Boer War prisoners, 1900. The ways in which historians interpreted such events as they unfolded was the subject of a Twitter debate

"Arthur Conan Doyle revised his account of the Boer War while it was still playing out"



Clive Emsley on his receipt of an honorary doctorate from Edge Hill University

OBITUARY

Clive Emsley (1944–2020)

Historian Clive Emsley, who explored the history of crime and policing across a long career, has died at the age of 76.

Emsley completed a degree at the University of York and undertook research at the University of Cambridge, before joining the newly founded Open University as a lecturer in 1970. He also held the position of visiting professor at institutions in Australia, France, Canada and New Zealand, and in 1995 he was elected president of the International Association for the History of Crime and Criminal Justice, a role he held until his death.

Broadening access to historical material was a recurring theme throughout Emsley's career. He played a key role in developing and cataloguing the Open University's extensive archive chronicling the history of policing in the UK. He was also co-director of the Old Bailey Online project (*oldbaileyonline.org*), which allows users to search the proceedings of London's central criminal court. Emsley wrote extensively, too, with more recent work increasingly focusing on the issue of crime and policing in wartime.

"Professor Clive Emsley was a long-time advisor and friend to *BBC History Magazine*, and we greatly mourn his death," said Dave Musgrove, the magazine's content director. "He regularly shared his expertise with us about the history of crime and policing and wrote several excellent pieces on the subject for the magazine and website." H

GETTY IMAGES/EDGE HILL UNIVERSITY

HISTORY IN THE NEWS

A selection of the stories hitting the **history headlines**

Remains found in a burial site in Sweden. New research suggests 'Viking' identity was more social than genetic

Study shows Vikings had diverse roots

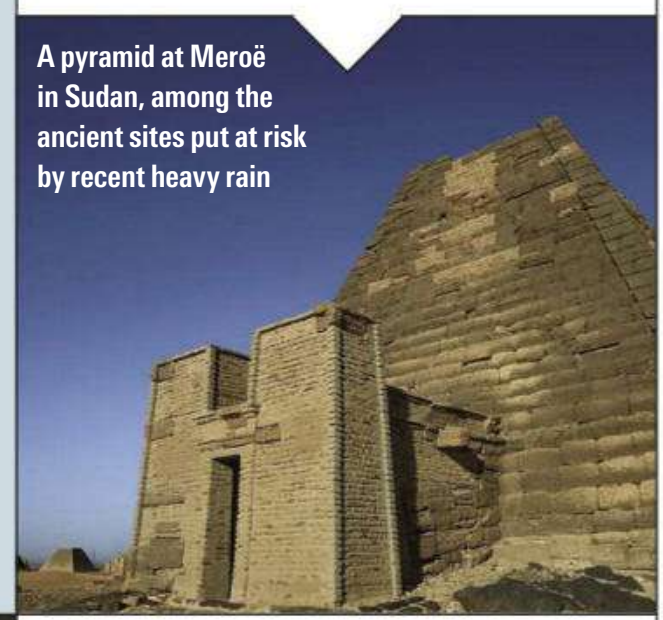
New research suggests that the Vikings were surprisingly genetically diverse. The six-year project, carried out by teams from the universities of Copenhagen and Cambridge, sequenced DNA material taken from the skeletons of more than 400 people found in Viking cemeteries in Europe and Greenland.

The results revealed key regions of what is now Scandinavia had very diverse populations, suggesting the mixing of local people with those from other areas. For instance, DNA evidence indicates that people with Asian genetic heritage travelled to Scandinavia – suggesting a 'Viking' identity was cultural, not genetic.

"These results show what we as archaeologists have known for quite a long time – that the idea of a pure 'Viking nation' is really not reflected in reality at all," said Cat Jarman, an archaeologist at the Museum of Cultural History in Oslo, when commenting on the new research. You can hear more of her reaction to the study on the History Extra podcast, available at *historyextra.com/viking-dna.*

Nile floods threaten pyramids

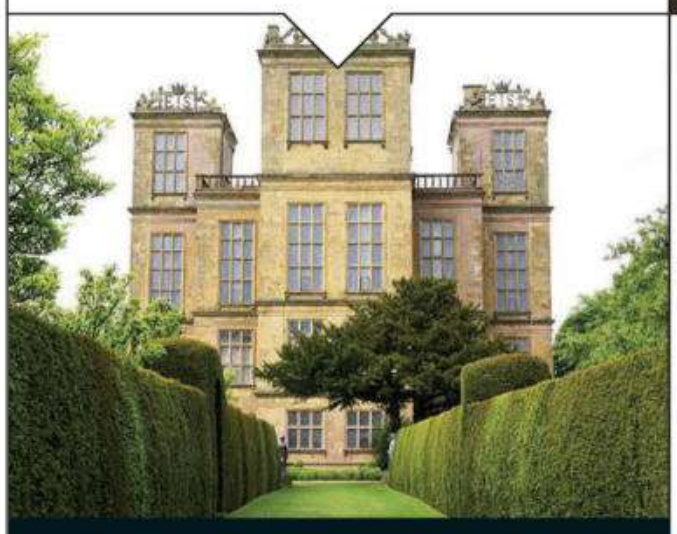
Heavy rainfall in Sudan has caused the Nile to reach unprecedented heights, putting the nation's archaeological sites at risk. The steep-sided pyramids of Meroë, which number more than 200, lie only 500 metres away from the banks of the river, while ancient tombs in Nuri have already suffered water damage. Authorities are deploying sandbag walls and pumps in a bid to divert the flooding, which has also affected more than 500,000 people from states throughout the country.



A pyramid at Meroë in Sudan, among the ancient sites put at risk by recent heavy rain

Up to a third of National Trust properties 'have colonial links'

A new report published by the National Trust shows that 93 of its 300 houses have "direct connections" to British colonialism and that such ties are often evident through the artefacts on display in those houses. Initiatives put in place by the National Trust to address its properties' pasts include the Colonial Countryside project, which invites school pupils to explore the colonial history of British country houses. To read more, **see our feature starting on page 44**.



Hardwick Hall in Derbyshire is one of the National Trust properties with colonial links included in the report

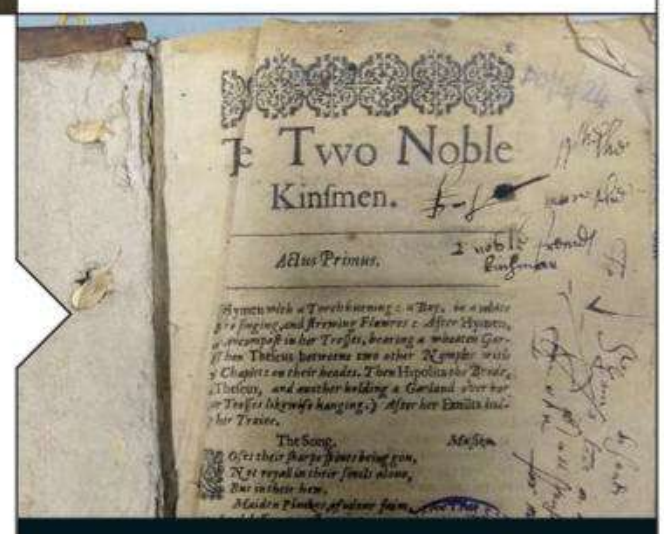
This musical instrument was crafted by Bronze Age people from the femur of a dead ancestor

Bronze Age people 'made keepsakes from dead relatives'

Experts have uncovered evidence of a Bronze Age tradition that may seem grisly to modern eyes: fashioning keepsakes from the remains of the dead. Analysis revealed that bone fragments placed in grave sites around Britain were taken from people who had died generations earlier. In some cases, such as that of a polished human thigh bone shaped into a whistle, they had been crafted into mementoes for display and as a means to remember the dead.

Expert finds Shakespeare play

A rare copy of the final play written by William Shakespeare – a tragicomedy published in 1634 entitled *The Two Noble Kinsmen* – has been discovered by a scholar in Spain. The work, based on a section of Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*, was co-written with fellow playwright John Fletcher. The edition was found in a volume in a library in Salamanca and dates from 1634, meaning it may be the oldest copy of a Shakespearean work yet found in that country. H



Pages from an edition of Shakespeare's little-known final play were found in a library in Salamanca, Spain

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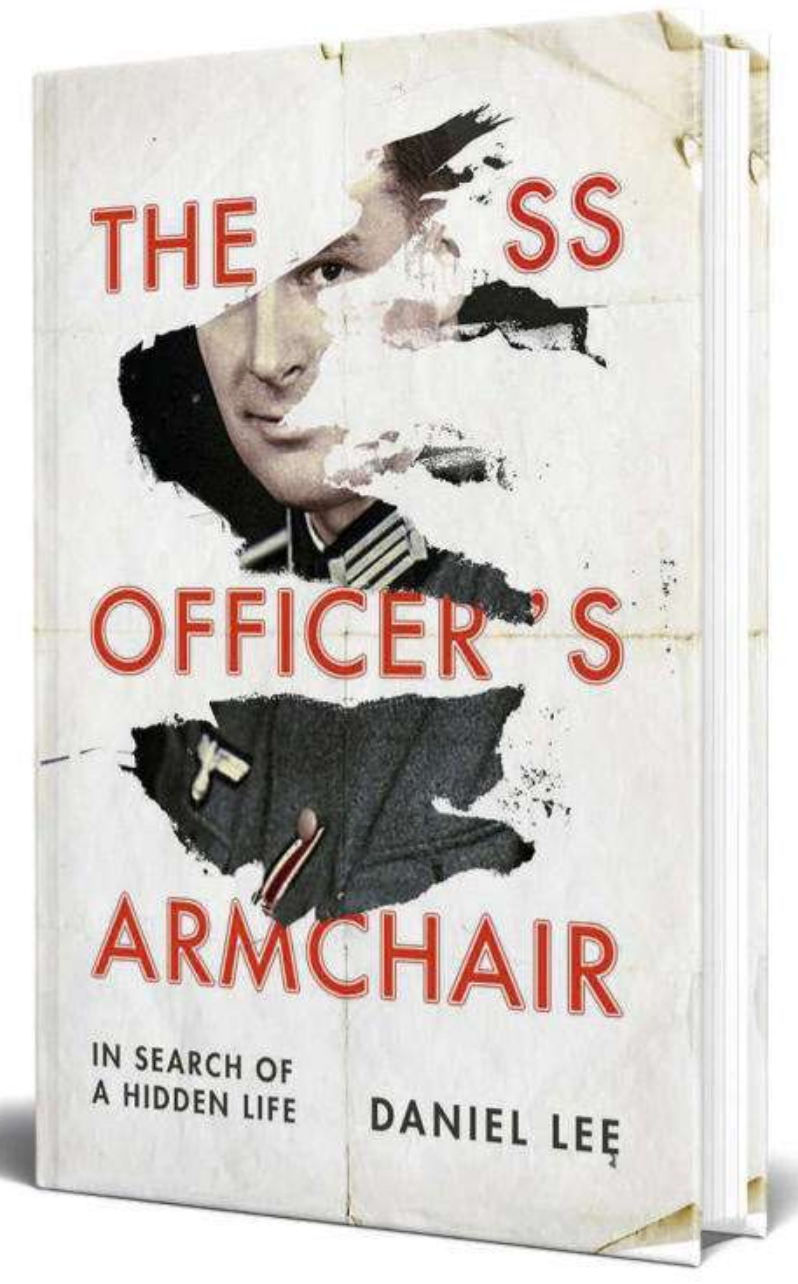
It began with a surprise discovery of
Nazi documents hidden in an armchair.

It became a historical detective story
that will grip you to the very last page.



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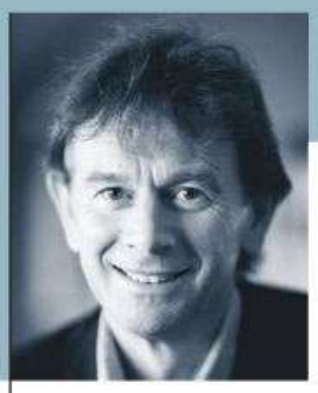


MICHAEL WOOD ON...
THE POWER OF PERSONAL HISTORY

"History at its most affecting is the tale of a single life through time"

We are often told that the majority of history searches in archives, libraries and record offices, both in person and online, concern family history and genealogy. We all want to know about ourselves: where are we from? Who do we think we are? This fundamental human urge to know about our past is the theme of some of the best history books I have read this year. Take, for example, Philippe Sands' brilliant *East West Street*. On one level this is a human rights lawyer's compelling story of the development of the legal concepts of genocide and crimes against humanity. But at its root, it is the tale of a family devastated by the Holocaust, whose unanswered questions lie in a suitcase of documents and photographs left by grandma. It's also the story of eastern European societies destroyed by conflicting nationalisms and by the horrors of Nazism.

I must say that I find these lost worlds – the *shtetls*, or little towns, of central and eastern Europe where Jews lived; the cultured cities of Galicia – viscerally haunting. Their loss feels as if part of the world's ecosystem has gone, as indeed it has. And, perhaps, these lost worlds are particularly tantalising for all of us who love history. Are they in part what draws us to study the past? Do we all hope to somehow bring back lost time, and, as the novelist Milan Kundera put it, having lived under totalitarian communism, fight in "the struggle of memory against forgetting"?

I was musing over these perennial questions for all historians – whether they are teaching in schools, making films, writing books, or mapping out their own family histories – when I received the gift of another book, one that is set in my native Greater Manchester: Lemn Sissay's *My Name Is Why*. Justly celebrated for its wonderful writing, its powerful and affecting poetry, and its sheer humanity, it is not overtly a history book, but for me it is a model for historians everywhere. It's a personal memoir, the retrieval of a lost life, taking us from Sissay's infancy and childhood with a foster family through to his teenage years, which he spent confined in various care institutions. At the core of the book is an archive, and Sissay's interpretation of it: the care system's dossier of a child's life from birth to the age of 18, in which Sissay – now a grown man – finally discovers who he is.

Sissay got hold of his personal file late in the story: in 2015, when he was 48 and determined to recover his own history. The documents in it open up his lost past in sometimes heart-wrenching detail. They begin in 1967 at St Margaret's House, an "Institution for Unmarried Mothers attached to the Liverpool Board of Moral Welfare" – just like a fable from Dickens, only here and (almost) now. Drawing on doctors' notes, school reports and social workers' letters, the memoir does what the best history does, offering multiple perspectives on events though the eyes of the people he knew. Sissay gives us the words of those who, for official purposes, saw him, described him, and watched him grow up: those who cared; those who were indifferent – having the 'just a job' mentality – and those who so painfully rejected him.

The tale is shot through with the pervasive racism of the time. The implacable bureaucracy (to which he gives the Orwellian title "The Authority") seems almost designed to defeat the child's hopes – and his right – to live a happy life and find self-expression. But the documents (which are reproduced in the book in their original typescripts) are linked together by a narrative in which Sissay, like a historian of the heart, critiques the meaning of the evidence. Does this source say what I think it does? Who wrote this, and why? It all serves as a reminder, too, that there is bias in all historical sources, deceptively raw and unmediated as they may appear, onto which we impose our meanings.

So this intimate memoir, rightly praised for its searing honesty and literary artistry, is also a model for the structure of all historical inquiry. "History may be servitude. History may be freedom," wrote TS Eliot in *Four Quartets*. For Lemn Sissay, one imagines that writing this personal history became a kind of freedom. History is many things, but at its most powerfully affecting it is the tale, explored with truth, clarity and feeling, of a single life through time. H

Michael Wood is professor of public history at the University of Manchester. He has presented numerous BBC series and his latest book is *The Story of China* (Simon & Schuster, 2020). His Twitter handle is @mayavision

BBC

ILLUSTRATION BY **FEMKE DE JONG**

ANNIVERSARIES

DOMINIC SANDBROOK highlights events that took place in December in history

5 DECEMBER 1791

Mozart meets an untimely end

The composer dies before finishing his last masterpiece

It is one of the most famous scenes in musical history. The brilliant composer, perhaps the greatest who ever lived, sits huddled in a coach in Vienna, talking to his wife about his unfinished *Requiem*. He is writing it, he says tearfully, for himself. "I feel definitely, that I will not last much longer; I am sure I have been poisoned. I cannot rid myself of this idea."

As anyone who has seen the film *Amadeus* knows, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart died on 5 December 1791 after months of agonising illness, carried off amid a raging storm. Or did he?

In fact, most biographers believe Mozart was in good spirits before his death. The composer had indeed been ill, but he was feeling better and enjoying the challenge of writing his *Requiem*. The story that his rival, Antonio Salieri, had secretly commissioned it to drive him to his death is entirely false. So too is the myth that he died of syphilis. Probably he died of an infectious fever sweeping Vienna in the last weeks of 1791, the same disease that killed hundreds of others.

Two days later, Mozart was buried in a pauper's grave. The gale howled, and all day, rain hammered down in the sepulchral darkness. The heavens themselves were weeping – or were they? Actually, contemporary accounts suggest it was a mild, misty day, with only a moderate wind. Even the pauper's grave is a fiction. Mozart was buried in an ordinary unmarked grave, like the overwhelming majority of middle-class Viennese.

The funeral of Mozart in December 1791 is an event which has been shrouded in myth, as has the young composer's death

A policeman uses a flare to guide traffic during the Great Smog of 1952. *The Daily Telegraph* reported how this heavy fog "blacked out central London... All buses had stopped by 10pm. Hundreds of cars were abandoned"

BRIDGEMAN/MIRRORPIX/AKG-IMAGES

This 1834 painting shows a scene from a staging of *Othello*, where a woman portrays Desdemona

8 DECEMBER 1660

For the first time in English history, **a professional actress steps onto a public stage**, playing Desdemona in a production of Shakespeare's *Othello*. Disappointingly, however, her identity remains unclear: Margaret Hughes is the traditional answer, but some historians think she was Anne Marshall.

5 DECEMBER 1952

The Great Smog smothers London

Chaos reigns as the city is cloaked in impenetrable fog

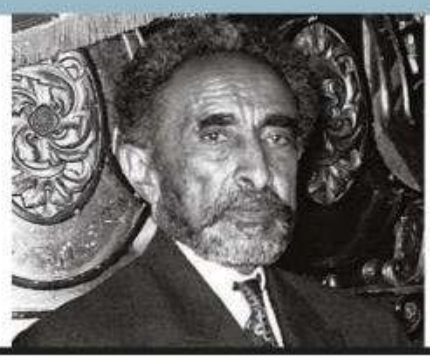
It began as just a curious weather story. The previous morning, reported *The Daily Telegraph* on 6 December 1952, a "thick fog covered almost the whole of south-west London", creating "almost a complete blackout". So far it had claimed only one victim: "A mallard, presumably blinded by the fog, crashed into Mr John Maclean as he was walking home in Ifield Road, Fulham. Both were slightly injured. Mr Maclean handed the bird to the RSPCA."

So began the Great Smog of 1952. Like most major cities, the capital had suffered from air pollution for decades, but this was different. An anticyclone hung over London, trapping the soot and smoke released from the coal fires on which millions of people relied. This created a noxious smog that lasted for five days and killed between 4,000 and 12,000 people.

At first there was no sense of panic. Londoners lived beneath a low-level smog anyway; why should this be worse? But by Monday the headlines were increasingly alarming. "London's 40-Mile Fog Blackout," read the front page of *The Daily Telegraph*, warning that the smog had "blacked out central London and a band 40 miles across... All buses had stopped by 10pm. Hundreds of cars were abandoned."

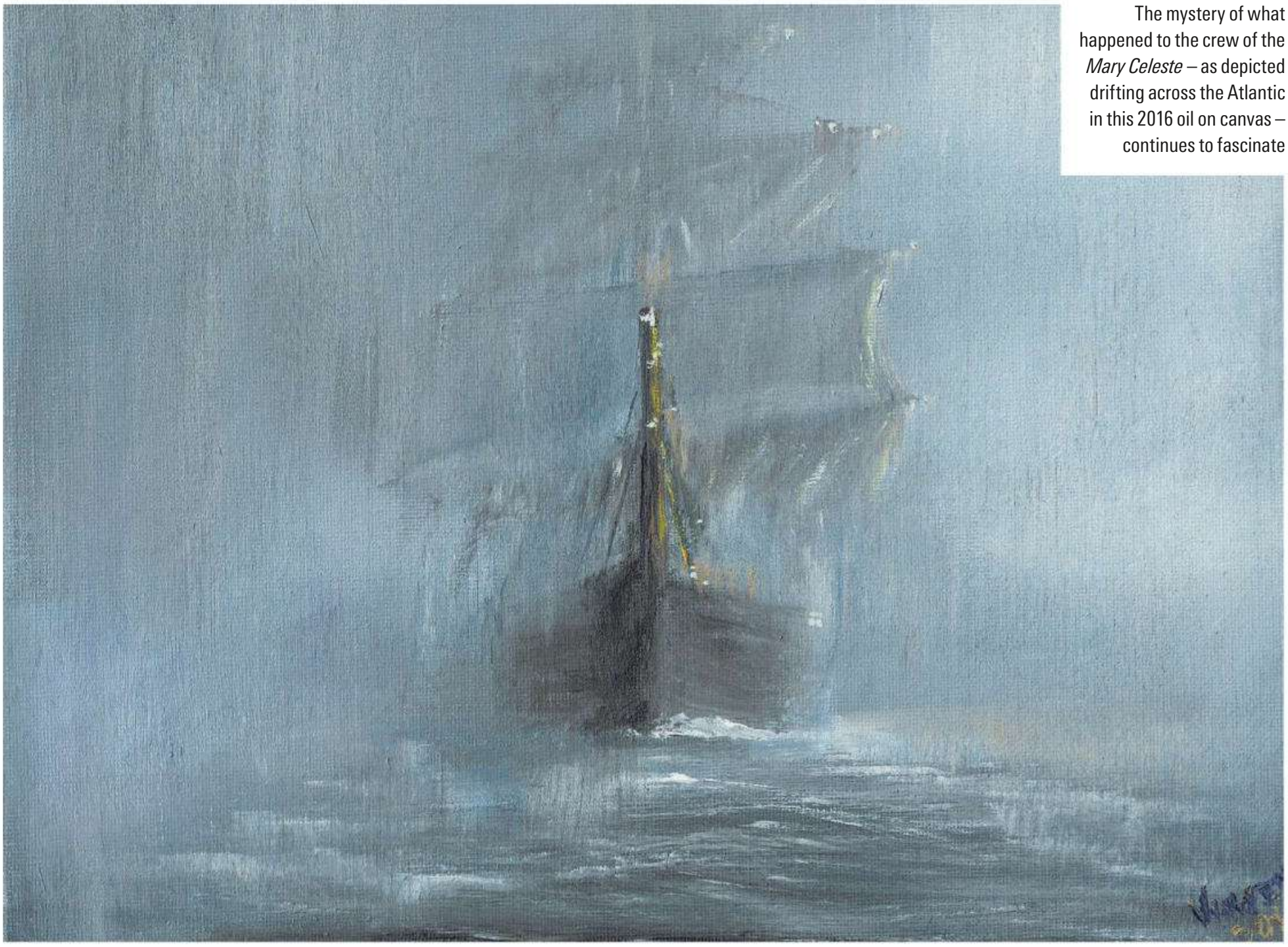
Flights were rerouted, concerts cancelled and ambulance services reported that routine journeys took five times longer than usual. At Liverpool Street station, a judge was so confused that he walked straight off the station platform. "Some think well of frost or snow, and rain is an undoubted necessity," thundered one columnist. "But there is no decent use for fog… Fog is a dirty and stifling cloud without any silver lining at all."

The only winners, in fact, were London's thieves, for whom the smog was a gift. But it did not last: by Tuesday the fog was clearing. And thanks to the Clean Air Act that came into effect four years later, it never returned on such a scale.



13 DECEMBER 1960

While Ethiopia's Emperor Haile Selassie (left) is on a state visit to Brazil, a group of **dissident officials launch an abortive coup**, triggering heavy fighting in the capital, Addis Ababa. But the coup lacks popular support and fizzles out even before the emperor has returned home.



The mystery of what happened to the crew of the *Mary Celeste* – as depicted drifting across the Atlantic in this 2016 oil on canvas – continues to fascinate

4 DECEMBER 1872

Sailors spot a mysterious ghost ship

The abandoned Mary Celeste is discovered drifting in the Atlantic

It was about one in the afternoon of Wednesday 4 December 1872, and the Canadian brigantine *Dei Gratia* was making good time across the Atlantic. Then, as Captain Morehouse was coming on deck, the helmsman reported a ship some six miles away, moving very oddly.

For two hours Morehouse and his men watched the ship. They hailed her, but there was no reply. At last Morehouse sent his first and second mates in a small boat to find out what was going on.

As the mates approached the stricken vessel, they realised that they knew her. She was an American merchant ship, barely a decade old. Only a few weeks earlier both ships had been in New York Harbor, and their captains vaguely knew one another. This was Captain Benjamin Briggs' ship, the *Mary Celeste*. But where were the crew?

As the two mates investigated, the mystery deepened. Contrary to myth, there were no untouched meals and no signs of a struggle. The sails were poorly set, some of the hatches were open and there was a little water in the hold, but the ship was otherwise in decent order. The captain's cabin was slightly messy, and his papers were missing. So, tellingly, was the lifeboat. But the galley was tidy, and there were plenty of supplies. Above all, there were no signs of a fight, no hints of fire or disaster – nothing, in short, that would explain the disappearance of the entire crew.

Now Morehouse escorted the *Mary Celeste* to Gibraltar for a salvage hearing. But still there were no answers. Some people said Captain Briggs had gone mad and slaughtered his crew; others suggested that Morehouse had done it. There was talk of a seaquake, an iceberg, or a gas explosion, prompting the crew to abandon ship. But the most inventive answer came in 1965, in an episode of *Doctor Who*. The crew, the programme suggested, had been frightened into jumping overboard by the appearance of Daleks.

GETTY IMAGES/BRIDGEMAN

Ships launch a search after the collapse of the Tay Rail Bridge in 1879. There were no survivors

28 DECEMBER 1879

Tragedy strikes at the Tay Rail Bridge

High winds and faulty engineering cost 75 lives

"Beautiful railway bridge of the silv'ry Tay / Alas! I am very sorry to say / That ninety lives have been taken away / On the last sabbath day of 1879 / Which will be remember'd for a very long time." So begins William McGonagall's *The Tay Bridge Disaster*, often described as the worst poem in history. It did not even get the casualty figures right. But behind this unintended comic tribute lay a genuinely tragic story.

Opened in June 1878, the Tay Rail Bridge was one of the engineering marvels of Victorian Scotland, spanning almost two miles across the firth of Tay to Dundee. Costs had risen during construction, and the architect, Thomas Bouch, had made virtually no allowance for high winds.

So when a ferocious storm blew up on the evening of 28 December 1879, the result was disaster. At exactly 7.13pm, the Edinburgh express, which had come from Burntisland and was pulling five carriages and a luggage van, was given the signal to proceed onto the bridge. But when it was halfway across, there was a flash of light – and then total darkness.

The collapse happened within moments, toppling the train, the bridge and even some of the supporting girders into the Tay. Counting staff, there had been about 75 people on board. There were no survivors. Much of the blame was aimed at Bouch, who had been knighted after the bridge first opened. He died less than a year later, reportedly from "shock and distress of mind". H

Dominic Sandbrook's latest book is *Who Dares Wins: Britain, 1979–1982* (Allen Lane, 2019)

ALAMY/SHUTTERSTOCK/ MAHASIDDHI

WHY WE SHOULD REMEMBER...

When **Coronation Street** held up a mirror to working-class Britain

BY **DOROTHY HOBSON**

Sixty years ago, on Friday 9 December 1960 at 7pm, the now familiar opening titles and theme tune heralded the first episode of Granada's new soap opera, *Coronation Street*, performed live on ITV. It was expected to run for 13 episodes.

This opening episode is a fine example of social history, Shakespearean in the way that we learn about the street's residents in conversations between characters. The dialogue and visuals reveal social and cultural norms which would be known to some viewers but new to others. Examples abound. A taken-down notice reading "Please do not ask for credit as a refusal often offends" is explained: "A bit on the slate's not a bad thing. If you didn't let some of 'em have it they wouldn't spend nearly as much." But one family, the Tanners, are only trusted with 10 bob (50p) credit. Postwar poverty was still the norm: we learn empty bottles are returned to the corner shop, and customers shopped for one item at a time.

The mores of working-class life and the results of higher education play out in the Barlows' living room with Frank, a postal worker, his wife, Ida, and their college-educated son, Ken. Embarrassed by his father, Ken is out-growing his class: "Do we have to have the bread buttered on the table, cups of tea *with* the food?"

Ena Sharples epitomises the older lady, guardian of values and gleaner of information. In her first appearance she enters the corner shop, enquires about the marital status and religion of the new owner, revealing that having no particular religion meant you were assumed to be Church of England and that social advancement necessitated attendance at church. She shops for cakes, or 'fancies', enquires about their freshness, and chooses six. She buys bleach, essential for maintaining high working-class standards of cleanliness. She warns against Elsie Tanner. Every action tells us something about working-class culture at that time.

"Social and personal awareness has been Coronation Street's forte since its first episode"

Patricia Phoenix as Elsie Tanner – remembered for her battles with neighbourhood gossip Ena Sharples – in the first episode of *Coronation Street*

The immediate reaction to *Coronation Street* was positive, and within a few months it was shown in every ITV region. Social and personal awareness has always been its forte. You can see this in the first episode, as young Dennis Tanner struggles to find a job after a term in prison, and the show has continued to reflect cultural and social change ever since. It has tackled contentious and important issues: 13-year-old Sarah-Louise's pregnancy; Hayley's transgenderism; female and male rape; serious and terminal illness. The happiness and sorrow of love, marriage, birth, friendship, death and the most intricate personal and family relationships have all been part of its history. It remains the world's longest-running soap opera, reflecting life in the north of England through its characters and their stories. H

Dorothy Hobson is a cultural historian specialising in media and the author of *Soap Opera* (Polity, 2002)

HIDDEN HISTORIES

DAVID OLUSOGA explores lesser-known stories from our past

"Desks went from a niche furniture item to the work station of millions"

It seems that the age of the office may be coming to an end. Few people now imagine that after the great experiment in homeworking brought about by the pandemic there will be a wholesale return to the office. For centuries going to the office meant sitting for hours at a desk, an item of furniture firmly associated in our minds with the workplace. Yet for the desk, the homeworking revolution of 2020 represents a return to an earlier chapter of its history, because the desk was formerly part of the domestic realm.

The first desks used in the home took their cue from those that had been used by scribes in medieval monasteries. These were small, portable and box-like, usually made from oak. In the 15th century, after the invention of the printing press, they became not just surfaces to write upon, but also containers in which books could be stored. Over time the tops of these portable desks were built to incline downwards, each of their bottom edges fitted with a lip to keep books in place. Inside were compartments for inks and quills, as well as books. William Shakespeare almost certainly wrote his plays at such a desk.

The 17th century heralded the beginnings of what became a national postal system. There was a great boom in letter writing, and desks became increasingly common.

After the Great Fire of London in 1666 and the destruction of over 13,000 homes in the capital, new types of desk became fashionable. As wealthy Londoners built new homes for themselves in the ashes of the old medieval city, they furnished them with larger, free-standing and more elaborate desks – true items of furniture rather than portable boxes. New desks like the escritoire or secretaire were brought over from France, with fronts that could be unfolded to create writing surfaces. These desks were known by their French name, 'bureau', and over time they became synonymous with the room the writing took place in – the office – which in turn gave rise to the word 'bureaucracy'.

By the 18th century, writing desks were common items of furniture in the homes of the wealthy. Master cabinet makers such as Thomas Chippendale began to produce elaborate mahogany desks, decorated with showy marquetry, that the wealthy placed in their townhouses and the libraries of their country homes.

Yet it was the arrival of the industrial revolution that transformed the desk. No longer a niche item of furniture, it became the work station of literally millions of middle-class clerks. Complex industries such as manufacturing, railways and banking needed clerks to manage invoices, accounts and correspondence. Like the heavy manual work carried out in the country's expansive mills and factories, the work of the clerks could be done more efficiently if they were brought together in large offices and each assigned to a desk.

Increasingly large, purpose-built offices with rows of identical desks appeared, such as Somerset House, which housed the Navy Board and the Stamp Office. The East India Company built its offices in London's Leadenhall Street, and from there its managers and clerks, the so-called 'writers', oversaw the rule and exploitation of the subcontinent. This tedious work involved endless hours sat at desks copying documents by hand up to five times over. In a letter to his friend William Wordsworth, the essayist Charles Lamb, who made his living as an East India Company writer, spoke of his yearning for "a few years between the grave and the desk!"

So firmly was the office associated with the desk in the 19th and 20th centuries that whole generations were taught to aspire to 'desk jobs', which conveyed middle-class status. In the 21st century, the laptop, the internet and now video conferencing software – along, of course, with this year's pandemic – have broken the hold of the office and the desk job. A small, portable desk on which a laptop can easily be placed is the new fashion, as the desk morphs back into one of its earlier forms. H

David Olusoga is professor of public history at the University of Manchester. His series *Britain's Forgotten Slave Owners* and *Black and British: A Forgotten History* are currently available on BBC iPlayer

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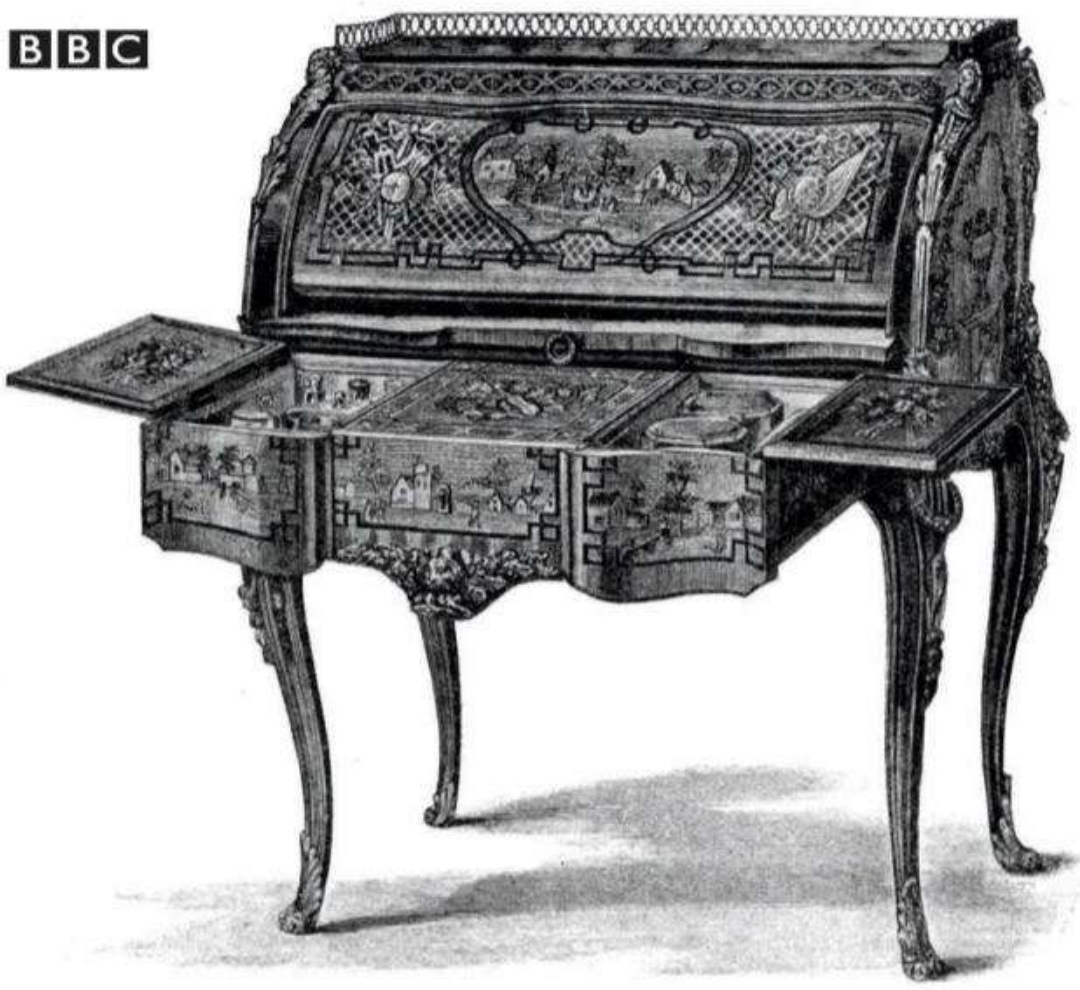

Lap of luxury

A depiction of a marqueterie escritoire that may have belonged to Marie Antoinette. In the 18th century, elaborate writing desks were common pieces of furniture in the residences of the wealthy, being found in their townhouses and country homes

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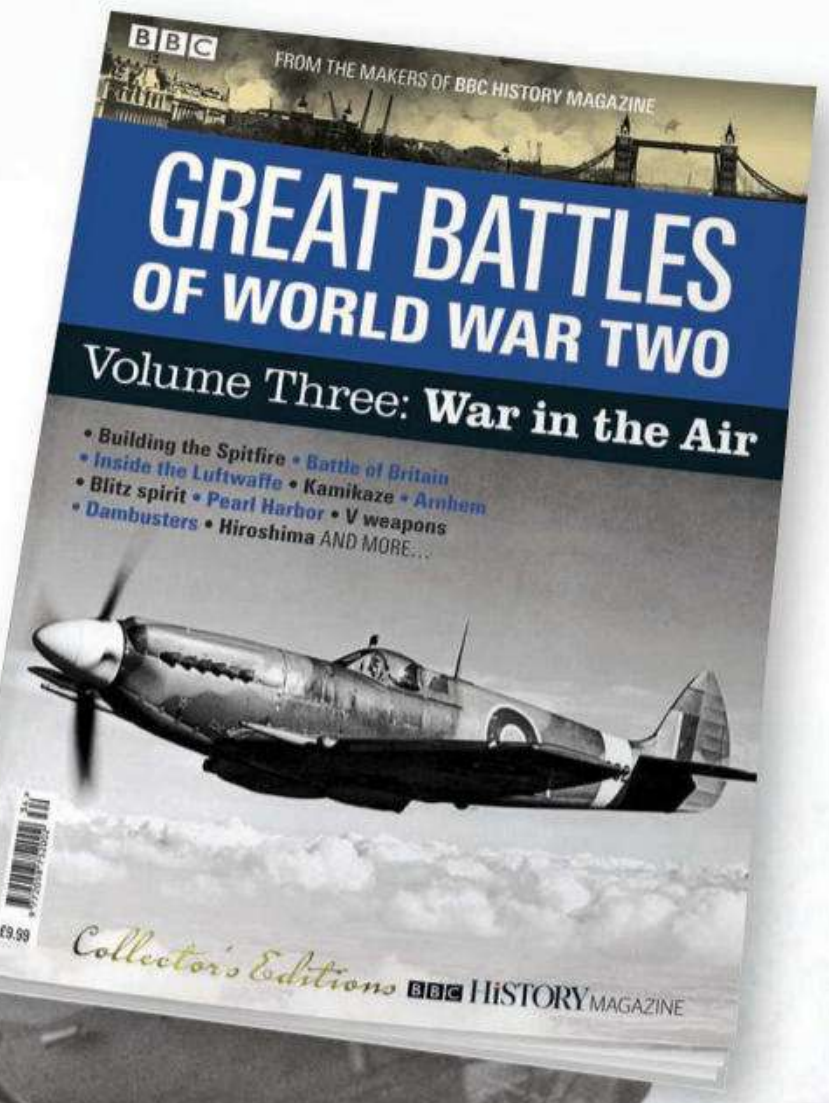
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Men of No 83 Squadron are all smiles as they pass a Handley Page Hampden bomber at RAF Scampton, Lincolnshire, October 1940

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GETTY IMAGES

LETTERS

An illustration of Robert Burns' poem *Tam O'Shanter*, which was inspired in part by his friend Francis Grose

LETTER OF THE MONTH

Conjuring the spirits

I read with interest about Captain Francis Grose and his contribution to the English language (*My History Hero*, November). However, Captain Grose also had a hand in creating one of Scotland's most famous literary figures, *Tam O'Shanter* by Robert Burns. After publishing *The Antiquities of England and Wales*, in 1788 Grose came up to Scotland to produce a book in a similar vein, *The Antiquities of Scotland*.

In the course of his research, he was introduced to Robert Burns, and the two became friends immediately. Burns suggested that Grose should include the ruined, reputedly haunted kirk at Alloway (very close to where he was born) in his new book, and Grose agreed on condition that Burns provided a suitably spooky story to go along with the picture. And so *Tam O'Shanter* was conceived, complete with a bagpipe-playing Auld Nick, witches dancing hornpipes and reels and Cutty-sark, the young witch who chases Tam and almost catches him before he gets to safety. To my mind, it's the finest narrative poem in the English language, and in large part that's down to Captain Francis Grose.
Peter Peddie, Fife

We reward the *Letter of the Month* writer with a copy of a new history book. This issue, that is **Burning the Books: A History of Knowledge Under Attack** by Richard Ovenden. You can read our review of the book on page 78

Research and rescue

I was interested to see K Shaw's letter (November), in which she commented on the role of the Isle of Man in the Second World War. I will always be indebted to the Isle of Man Steam Packet Company, because it was their boat, the *Ben-my-Chree*, that rescued my father from the beaches of Dunkirk in 1940.

A few years ago, I visited the museum at Douglas on the Isle of Man to try to find any information about the *Ben-my-Chree*. The man I spoke to was busily engaged at his computer, and his reaction was surprising: he glared at me as if I was teasing him. It turned out he was actually typing up an account of the boat at that very moment! One of life's great coincidences. Without the *Ben-my-Chree*, I would probably not be here to write this letter.
Andy Morris, Hampshire

Bad education

I was alarmed but not surprised to read Matt Smith's letter in the November issue about the role of history teaching. It is not the remit of teachers to impose current views, or their own views, on impressionable children. I am so tired of the fashion for imposing current-day mores on standards of the past, and am deeply grateful that I was taught by a history teacher who allowed us to make up our own minds. Churchill couldn't help that he was "bred from a Victorian stock" – he *was* Victorian!
Julie Rowney, Yarnfield

Reassessing the rebellion

I read your interview with Afua Hirsch in the September issue with interest. In answer to a question asking whether any [African] resistance figures deserve more attention, she mentioned meeting a survivor of a Mau Mau detention centre, and being told the story of his bad treatment at the hands of the British.

It is important to remember that large numbers of ordinary black Kenyans – in the region of 2,000 to 2,500 – were killed by the Mau Mau for refusing to betray their British employers. In fact, the Mau Mau rebellion was not universally supported in Kenya, because of their violence and destruction of livelihoods. It must not be automatically assumed that these Mau Mau fighters were heroes fighting oppression: they did significant damage to their own people.

I must also correct a misunderstanding. Even though there is much to criticise the British for in their occupation of Kenya and other African countries, there are some positives, and relations were generally good – even affectionate – between the many tribes and the British. I noticed this especially in Botswana, where I lived for many years. Most of the expat British community I came across in both countries were decent hard-working individuals wanting to do their best for the country.

I do hope that you will include an article on the Mau Mau rebellion in one of your future editions.
Olibeng Greenwood, London

GETTY IMAGES/MARY EVANS

Kenyan women receiving training to defend against the Mau Mau uprising, c1955. The conflict's complexities are highlighted by reader Olibeng Greenwood

A display at Liverpool's International Slavery Museum. The ways in which we've learned about the slave trade sparked much reader debate

Averting Armageddon

Given the true horrors of nuclear weapons, no Civil Defence measures taken could ever have been more than token gestures (*Preparing for Armageddon*, October). Indeed, one could question whether living in the desolate wasteland that would have been left would have been worthwhile.

However, it is obvious that the only way of surviving such a war was to ensure that it never happened, and here western powers did follow a successful strategy. Despite huge public pressure from those who would have appeased the communist bloc by laying down our own nuclear weapons, the policy of deterrent did prevent the ultimate holocaust.

It was not 'protect and survive', nor 'duck and cover', but instead 'mutually assured destruction' that actually kept the population from suffering the effects of a global war.

Colin Bullen, Kent

In defence of President Trump

I found a lot of the comparisons of President Trump with previous presidents (*A President without Precedent?*, September) rather interesting. I was drawn in and enlightened until the end, when I became saddened and angry. It was very unfair to make the president out to be a racist because of his response to the incident in Charlottesville, Virginia [the 2017 Unite the Right rally of rightwing protesters, in which a counter-protester was killed and around 30 other people injured].

If his record is actually looked at, prior to the current pandemic, black unemployment rates were at a historic low. Trump also made clear that he wanted to help inner-city residents to a better life. Based on this, and his history with the African-American community, it's unfair to hang the label of 'racist' on him, and is reminiscent of the unwarranted liberal attacks on Trump here in the United States.

Willard Brush, Florida

Fair and balanced?

I agreed with Michael Wood's column on the 'Life in the UK' British history test in the October edition (as illustrated, below right), except in one respect: his view that "It's not about 'balance'".

To my mind, history is an essential part of education and understanding, without which we have no reference point from which to judge and evaluate the present, and to some degree inform ourselves for the future.

Views of historical events and people can – and, in many ways, should – change with new research and fresh perspectives. Yes, there need to be opposing or alternative views, but there also needs to be an acknowledgement that that's all they are: alternative views, since we all have our own perspectives and prejudices that inevitably colour how we see both the past and the present.

This is where historians have a responsibility: to ensure that people have as rounded and, dare I say, as balanced an understanding of past events and people as possible. Without such balance, people will inevitably fuel their own perspectives and prejudices. In the diverse, multicultural world in which we live, I would argue that being enlightened – both of ourselves and our past, and of other nations, cultures and faiths and their past – is fundamental to better understanding in a world in desperate need of understanding. For that, alternative and balanced views are required.

Robert Chalmers, Norwich

A different class

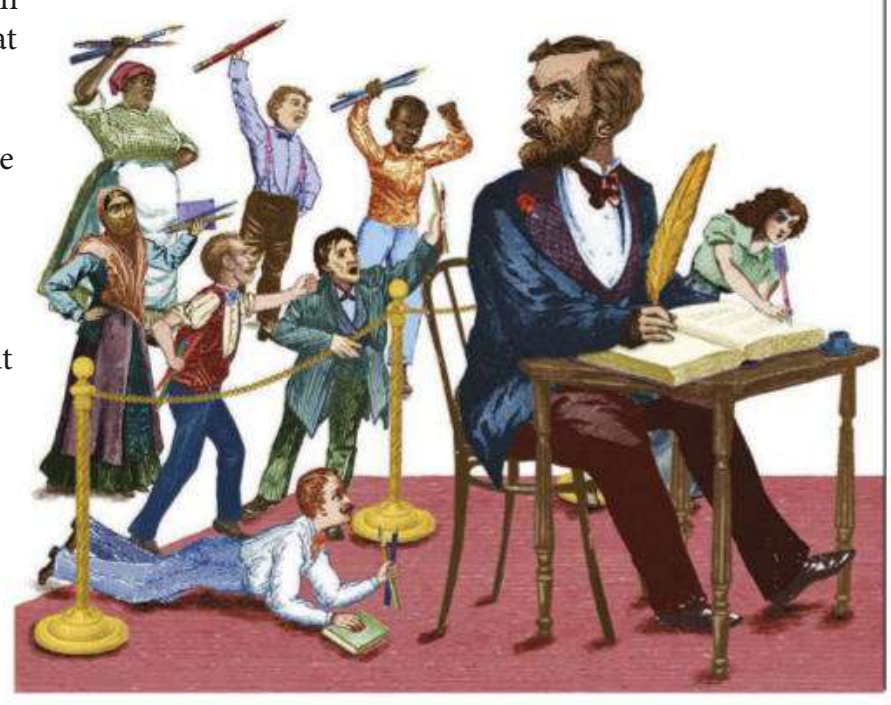
I do not share the recollections of Mike Dickson (*Letters*, September) and Richard Woodroofe (*Letters*, October) that the slave trade and British involvement in it were not taught in the 1960s. A small and unscientific survey of friends and family who studied history in the 1950s, 1960s, 1970s and 1980s found that we all recalled being told about the Atlantic (triangular) slave trade and Britain's (but not European) involvement in it. We all had clear memories of being shown an illustration of the appalling 'stowage plan' used on the ships, and of being told of the harsh conditions and overseers on the Caribbean plantations.

Until recent times, however, we did not learn about the great west African empires and their interactions with Arab and European traders in this 'white man's grave'. We also learnt nothing about the link between Caribbean plantations and the prosperity of British cities, which used to be attributed to the early adoption of new technologies and the exploitation of a plentiful supply of cheap British labour. Nor did we learn about the empires of east Africa, the Indian Ocean trades and British involvement in this area. More on these topics, please.

Hugh Bishop, Pembrokeshire

Further studies

In response to the letters regarding missing lessons, I went to school in the late 1980s



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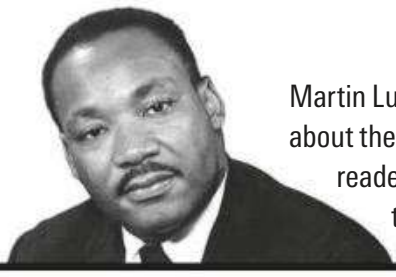


Martin Luther King in 1964. Learning about the slave trade triggered reader Richard Ealey's interest in the civil rights movement

and early 1990s and was taught about slavery, William Wilberforce and how Britain was at the forefront of its abolition. We were also taught about the many other nations that took part in this trade, which seems to be often forgotten.
Claire Perry, Abbots Langley

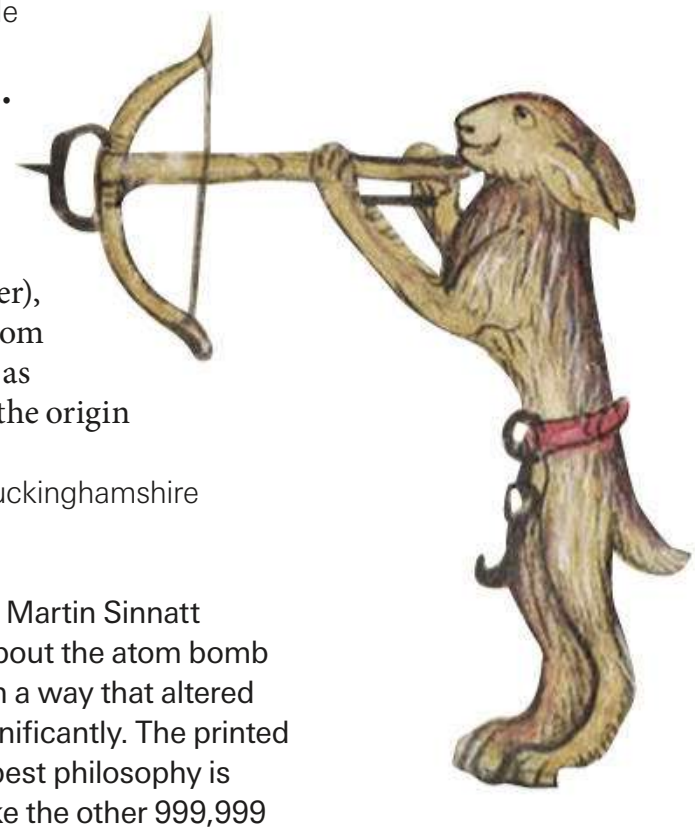
Lessons for the future

Unlike Mike Dickson, I certainly remember learning about Britain's role in the slave trade, and its brutality, growing up in the 1950s and 1960s. I am pretty sure this was covered at school, and resulted in my interest in and support for Martin Luther King's struggle for civil rights in the United States. I have discussed this with my contemporaries, who recall the same lessons.

These may be false memories but, in any event, there are many lessons to be learnt from this horrific part of our history which can be carried forward to achieve fairness, justice and equal opportunity for all.
Richard Ealey, Poole

That's all, folks...

On reading Johanna Green's delightful and informative article, *Medieval Marginalia* (September), the scales verily fell from mine eyes. The rabbit as hunter... Zounds, 'tis the origin of ye Bugs Bunny!
Robert Morgan, Buckinghamshire



Was this example of medieval marginalia the inspiration for a more recent illustrated rabbit?

Correction

Apologies to Maj Gen Martin Sinnatt for editing his letter about the atom bomb in the October issue in a way that altered the meaning quite significantly. The printed version ran: "My deepest philosophy is 'wasn't I lucky' – unlike the other 999,999 potential casualties", whereas his letter had read: "My deepest philosophy leads to 'wasn't I lucky' and weren't the other 999,999 potential casualties!"

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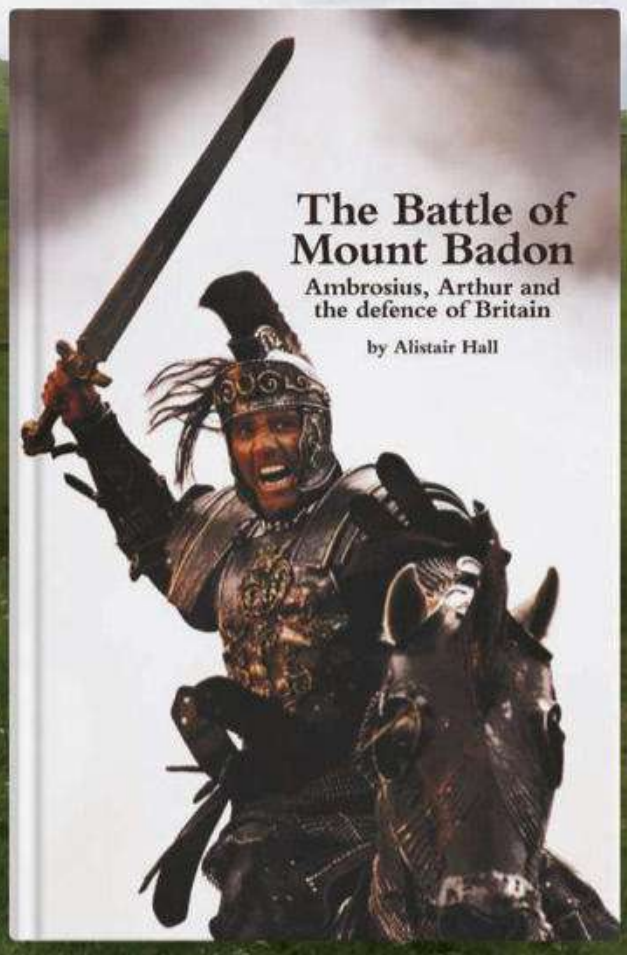
The Battle of Mount Badon

Ambrosius, Arthur and the defence of Britain by Alistair Hall

The Battle of Mount Badon published by Raven Fell brings the events leading to the end of Roman Britain and the impact of the decline of the Western Roman Empire into sharper focus. How did the Anglo-Saxons so quickly present the "invincible force" described by Bede and which "kings of the Britons", mentioned in the *Historia Brittonum*, engaged and eventually defeated them? With a stunning new perspective Alistair Hall questions the generally held chronology for fifth century Britain and proposes a comprehensive and plausible solution from the many clues that reside in the landscape and topography of northern Britain. In due course this book will become recognised as the game changer that edged King Arthur out of legend and into history.



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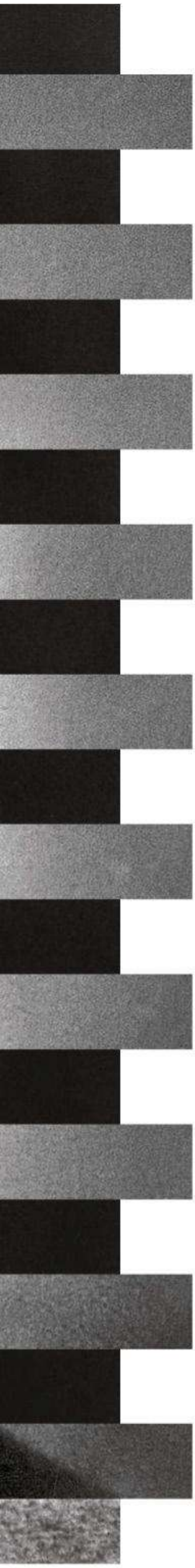

HITLER AND STALIN'S UTOPIAN DREAMS

Laurence Rees argues that, despite their many differences, the leaders of Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union were united by a common passion: to create their own warped version of a paradise on Earth

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A composite image of Joseph Stalin (left) and Adolf Hitler. Both men, writes Laurence Rees, "offered a vital purpose in life to their followers, in a world that could seem meaningless without religious belief"

Adolf Hitler and Joseph Stalin both cast long shadows over the 20th century. One, the leader of Nazi Germany, hoped to create a vast new empire underpinned by his racist beliefs; the other wanted to build the first communist state in the fledgling Soviet Union. But despite the differing nature of their goals, the two men were motivated by the same overarching passion: the desire to create what they believed was a utopia here on Earth. Unlike other dictators, many of whom resemble Mafia bosses, these two each thought that they had uncovered the secret of existence.

Yet as individual personalities, Hitler and Stalin could scarcely have been further apart. Over the last 30 years, in the course of writing various history books and making many historical documentaries, I've met a number of people who knew the dictators personally. And their recollections confirm that it was most certainly not the same thing to walk into a meeting with Stalin as to walk into one with Hitler.

Hitler, unlike Stalin, was the archetypical 'charismatic' leader. Such leaders rely primarily on the power of their own personalities to justify their office, don't fit well into bureaucratic structures and project an almost 'missionary' aura. Ulrich de Maizière, a general staff officer who attended meetings with Hitler in the last part of the Second World War, witnessed the dictator's supposed charismatic allure firsthand. He saw "men who came to tell [Hitler] it could not go on any longer – and even said that to him. And then he talked for an hour, and then they went and said: 'I want to give it another try'… He had an enormously strong will, you know, and he had powers of persuasion that could gloss over any rational arguments."

Personal magnetism

Karl Boehm-Tettelbach, a Luftwaffe adjutant at Hitler's headquarters, agreed that Hitler's persuasive abilities were impressive, saying: "He could [take] somebody who was ready for suicide, he could revive him and make him feel that he should carry the flag and die in battle. Very strange." Moreover, in their personal dealings, Boehm-Tettelbach found the Nazi leader to be "a respectable person… Charming as a host, not wild and shouting."

It is important to remember, however, that you almost always had to be predisposed to support the Nazi regime to be entranced by Hitler's personality. If you were not a staunch believer, then a meeting with Hitler could leave a very different impression. The British prime minister, Neville Chamberlain, found Hitler unimpressive when they met in 1938 and later described him as "the commonest-looking little dog" he had ever encountered. Chamberlain thought Hitler a crude and blustering rabble-rouser.

Hitler's inability to listen to others was not a new trait – he had been like this since his youth. August Kubizek, who knew him before the First World War, claimed that when Hitler was talking about a book he had just read, he didn't want to hear anyone else's opinion.

Indeed, one of the dangers of taking a meeting with Hitler – as the Italian Fascist leader, Benito Mussolini, discovered – was that it could be extremely difficult to get a word in edgeways. "Hitler talks, talks, talks, talks," recorded the Italian foreign minister, Count Ciano, in his diary after a meeting in April 1942. "Mussolini suffers – he who was in the habit of talking himself, and who, instead, practically has to keep quiet. On the second day, after lunch, when everything had been said, Hitler talked uninterruptedly for an hour and 40 minutes," discussing everything from religion to art and history. Thus – depending on your point of view – Hitler was either a crashing bore or an inspirational visionary.

It would be hard to come away from a meeting with Joseph Stalin feeling either of these extremes. In this respect, he was the reverse of Hitler. For the most part, the Soviet leader wanted other people to talk. He was an aggressive listener, and an even more aggressive watcher.

"Stalin was by nature very attentive," said Stepan Mikoyan, who grew up in the Kremlin in the 1930s. "He watched people's eyes when he was speaking – and if you didn't look him straight in the eye, he might well suspect that you were deceiving him. And then he'd be capable of taking the most unpleasant steps."

Vladimir Yerofeyev, an interpreter who translated for Stalin, said of the dictator: "It wasn't entirely safe to work with him because if he didn't like something, there would have been no forgiveness."

Enemies everywhere

One of the keys to Stalin's character, according to Stepan Mikoyan, was that he was "very suspicious". Since the Soviet dictator was comfortable lying to and betraying those around him, he saw no reason why his comrades should not behave in a similar manner. Mikoyan said: "He'd sense it if you were lying to him. The most terrible thing was to lie to him… that for him was the greatest crime of all."

It is hard to overestimate the importance of this insight. Stalin appears to have treated everything and everyone with suspicion. The dominant question in his mind was always: 'Who could be about to betray me?'

Hitler did not possess this level of personal wariness. He tended to trust those in his immediate circle until they clearly acted to deceive him. If he had not been this trusting, the attempt on his life by Count von Stauffenberg in July 1944 would almost certainly never have happened. Surprisingly, Stauffenberg – as an officer attending a military meeting – hadn't been asked to reveal the contents of his briefcase before he entered Hitler's presence. If he had, the bomb he carried would have been discovered. Indeed, it's significant that while there were a number of attempts on Hitler's life, there is not one similar, well-documented attempt on Stalin's. An intensely suspicious nature clearly has its benefits.

Stalin was the antithesis of the 'charismatic

Unlike other dictators, who resemble Mafia bosses, Hitler and Stalin believed they had uncovered the secret of existence

General Staff Officer Ulrich de Maizière – shown here c1970s – saw Hitler's famous "powers of persuasion" firsthand during the last stages of the Second World War

ALAMY

Total faith
Hitler (second left) meets with officials including Joseph Goebbels (centre) and Hermann Goering (left). The German leader tended to trust those in his immediate circle until they clearly acted to deceive him

Suspicious nature
Stalin was deeply fearful that those around him would betray him and viewed lying to him as the "greatest crime"

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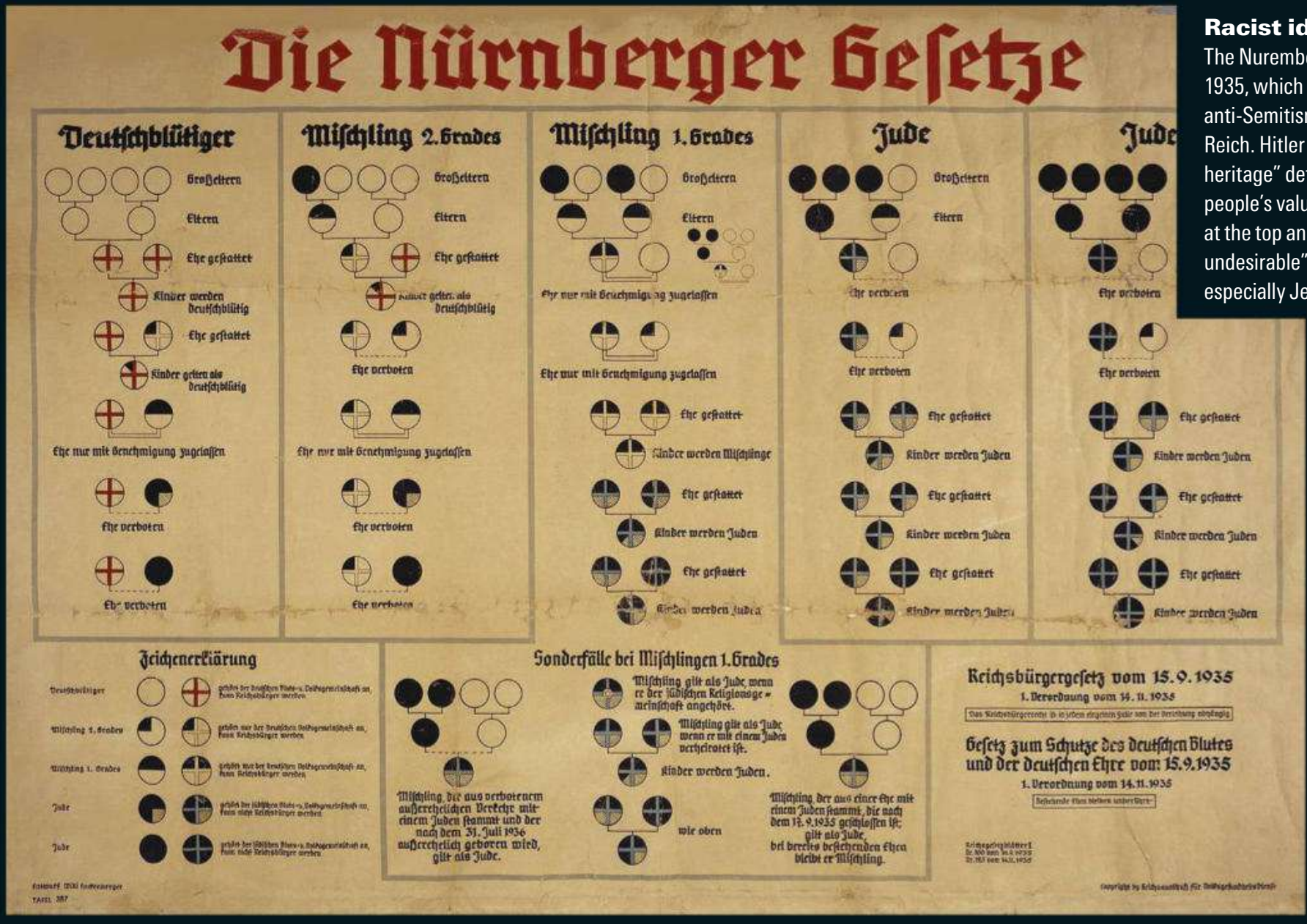
Strong influence
A propaganda poster from 1931 portrays the USSR as "the crack brigade of the world proletariat". Stalin was heavily influenced by the work of Karl Marx

Piercing gaze
Stalin in his office. "He watched people's eyes when he was speaking – and if you didn't look him straight in the eye, he might well suspect that you were deceiving him," recalled one eyewitness


Die Nürnberger Gesetze
Deutschblütiger
Mischling 2. Grades
Mischling 1. Grades
Jude
Großeltern
Eltern
Ehe gestattet
Kinder werden deutschblütig
Kinder gelten als deutschblütig
Ehe nur mit Genehmigung zugelassen
Ehe verboten
Kinder werden Mischlinge
Kinder werden Juden
Zeichenerklärung
Sonderfälle bei Mischlingen 1. Grades
Mischling, der aus verbotenem außerehelichen Verkehr mit einem Juden stammt und der nach dem 31. Juli 1936 außerehelich geboren wird, gilt als Jude.
Mischling gilt als Jude, wenn er der jüdischen Religionsgemeinschaft angehört.
Mischling gilt als Jude, wenn er mit einem Juden verheiratet ist.
Kinder werden Juden.
wie oben
Mischling, der aus einer Ehe mit einem Juden stammt, die nach dem 17. 9. 1935 geschlossen ist, gilt als Jude, bei bereits bestehenden Ehen bleibt er Mischling.
Reichsbürgergesetz vom 15. 9. 1935
1. Verordnung vom 14. 11. 1935
Gesetz zum Schutze des deutschen Blutes und der deutschen Ehre vom 15. 9. 1935
1. Verordnung vom 14. 11. 1935

Racist ideology
The Nuremberg Laws of 1935, which institutionalised anti-Semitism in the Third Reich. Hitler believed "racial heritage" determined people's value, with Aryans at the top and "racially undesirable" people – especially Jews – far below

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leader'. Not only was he a less than inspiring orator but, far from shunning the demands of bureaucracy, he embraced them. The Soviet leader had a profound understanding of the power of committee meetings. He presided over a gigantic expansion in the number of people working as administrators in the Soviet system – from fewer than 4 million in 1929 to nearly 14 million by 1939.

Conversely, Hitler was always suspicious of any institutional attempt to restrict him. He did everything he could to dismantle any centralised structure that could potentially usurp him. To that end he allowed the German cabinet to atrophy – indeed, Hitler's cabinet never met again after 1938.

Political thinkers

But while there were many differences between Hitler and Stalin, they shared one vital quality: they actually believed in something outside themselves and sought to create a new world. They weren't even similar to the religiously driven European monarchs of the past who had faith in a Christian god. On the contrary, both of the dictators abhorred Christianity. In private, Hitler remarked that "Christianity is an invention of sick brains" – though, for pragmatic reasons, he largely concealed his true opinion on the subject from the German public.

They were both profoundly post-Enlightenment figures. They believed not only that God was dead, but that he had now been replaced by a fresh, coherent ideology. And millions of those who followed the two dictators also subscribed to this new reality.

Hitler and Stalin, of course, believed in different things. The belief that Hitler proselytised was most certainly not the same as the one Stalin lived by. Equally, neither originated the ideologies that they thought revealed the truth about the nature of life; both adapted them from the work of others.

For Hitler, the starting point was to recognise the crucial importance of "race", an idea he developed from a whole series of writers who had gone before him. The core of his belief system was the assertion that the way to assess people's value was by examining their "racial heritage". And it was this conviction that helped fuel his murderous anti-Semitism. For there was to be no place in Hitler's utopia for a whole host of people whom he considered to be "racially undesirable" – the Jews in particular.

In keeping with his belief that his racial hatred was based on modern thinking, Hitler often expressed his prejudice using pseudo-scientific terms. "The Jew," Hitler wrote in his autobiography *Mein Kampf* in the early 1920s, "remains the typical parasite, a sponger who like a noxious bacillus keeps spreading as soon as a favourable medium invites him."

Like Hitler, Stalin had also been convinced by the work of others. The most influential was Karl Marx. It was primarily Marx's teachings that had drawn him into the world of revolution. According to Marx, working people – whom he called the "proletariat" – were alienated from productive life. Instead of work being, as it should be, a way for people to feel fulfilled, life in the grim factories of the 19th century was destructive to the human spirit.

The trouble was that, while Marx was brilliant at analysing the problem, the solution he proposed was not necessarily so convincing. One difficulty was that he asserted that history was destined to move through certain phases. For instance, there was an imperial phase, a feudal phase, a capitalist phase, a socialist phase and a communist phase. But this formulaic approach could prove problematic when applied to a wide variety of different countries and cultures.

Arguments raged among followers of Marx about exactly what the great man had meant by certain theories, and what was the best way of implementing them. Marxist followers denounced each other for corrupting Marxist teachings, much as medieval Christians had attacked each other for heresy.

There was thus an obvious gulf between Hitler and Stalin in the way that each viewed the world. One was a devout racist, the other a man who thought the environment primarily shaped individuals. One was a believer in the laws of "Nature", the other a dedicated follower of Karl Marx. What was more, they each passionately hated the other's belief system. Hitler feared and despised Bolshevism, and Stalin detested Nazism.

Chasing utopia

Similarly, there was a chasm between the two dictators in terms of their ultimate goals, with the communist aim of a stateless society presenting a sharp contrast to Hitler's idea of a giant empire based on violent racism. This clear distinction informs how the two ideologies are perceived today. The type of racial hatred that was at the core of Hitler's thinking is rightly condemned – indeed, expressing such beliefs is illegal in many countries – whereas there are still a number of people who proudly proclaim they are Marxists. But, in the context of Stalin's leadership, there is a problem with this analysis, because the harmonious goal of the Bolsheviks – of a state in which government "withered away" – was not realistically achievable under Stalin. And even Stalin came close to admitting as much.

In his address to the 18th Congress of the Communist party in March 1939, Stalin confessed that Marx and his collaborator, Friedrich Engels, had not always been right. Specifically, when Engels had said that once "there is nothing more to be repressed" then the state "withers away", he had failed to mention the "international factor". The problem, said Stalin, was that because other countries were not on the road to communism, the Soviet Union needed "at its disposal a well-trained army, well-organised punitive organs, and a strong intelligence service" to defend itself. In other words, expect the "well-organised punitive organs" to stay put, because there was no prospect of them leaving unless the whole world went communist, and who seriously thought that would happen in the foreseeable future?

Nonetheless, both Hitler and Stalin offered a vision of a future utopia. They were

Both dictators abhorred religion. In private, Hitler remarked that "Christianity is an invention of sick brains"

A statue of Karl Marx in Moscow. Stalin's followers struggled among themselves to decide how to implement the German philosopher's ideas

ALAMY

Class conflict
Soviet peasants who support Stalin carry banners calling for the extermination of the kulaks (wealthy peasants) in 1930. Many "enemies of the people" were murdered or imprisoned during Stalin's regime

Lost generation
Jews working in the Łódź Ghetto in Poland in 1940. Several million Polish Jews were to die in the Holocaust, including the vast majority of the Jews of Łódź

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different utopias, of course, but utopias nonetheless. The road to get there would be hard – even, as Stalin admitted in 1939, taking longer than people could possibly imagine – but a wonderful goal lay ahead regardless. Both of these utopian visions offered a purpose in life, in a world that could seem meaningless without religious belief.

For Nikonor Perevalov, born in 1917, the year of the Russian Revolution, the reason for his existence could not have been clearer. He believed he had been put on this Earth "to be a conscientious person, to lead the masses to [an] awareness of the need for the victory of socialism and communism". Perevalov subsequently tried to "improve the life of the peoples of Russia" by joining the Soviet Union's secret police, the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD) and organising mass deportations to Siberia.

Johannes Hassebroek, commandant of Gross-Rosen concentration camp, gained a similar purpose in life from his membership of the SS: "I was full of gratitude to the SS for the intellectual guidance it gave me. We were all thankful. Many of us had been so bewildered before joining the organisation. We did not understand what was happening around us, everything was so mixed up. The SS offered us a series of simple ideas that we could understand, and we believed in them."

Stamping out freedom

One of the "simple ideas" offered by both of the ideologies preached by Hitler and Stalin was staunch opposition to the values of liberal democracy. Both rejected outright the principles that constitute 'freedom' today. Both condemned free speech; both attacked human rights at every level. Crucially, both sought to destroy your ability to be an individual. You had no right to be the self you chose. You conformed to the new value system, or you were persecuted. Ultimately, this was the reason why the utopias Hitler and Stalin sought could never be free from tyranny – because even if the Promised Land had been reached, anyone who openly opposed this new paradise would be punished.

Hitler and Stalin were united, too, by the fact that they were both utterly merciless. They even appear, on occasion, to have admired each other's ruthlessness. When, in 1934, Hitler ordered the murder of the leader of the Nazi storm troopers, Ernst Röhm, together with other opponents, Stalin remarked: "What a great fellow! How well he pulled this off!" And in May 1943, Hitler said he envied Stalin for the way he had "got rid of all opposition in the Red Army and thus ensured there is no defeatist tendency in the army". However, the Nazi dictator had not always admired his Soviet opponent. Six years before, when Stalin had been presiding over the murder of large numbers of 'enemies of the people', Hitler had remarked that "Stalin is probably sick in the brain, otherwise you can't explain his bloody regime". It's a bleakly ironic statement, given that Hitler presided over the killing of more people than Stalin did.

During the Second World War, while Stalin deported whole groups of people into exile in the wilds of the Soviet Union, where many died, the core of Hitler's hatred was directed at the Jews. He decided that the Jews as a group – men, women and children – would be "exterminated", many in purpose-built factories of death. The Holocaust, a singular crime in the history of humanity, must be considered the most infamous part of Hitler's legacy.

The utopias Hitler and Stalin sought could never be free from tyranny – anyone who said they didn't like this new paradise would be punished

Adolf Hitler was known to praise Stalin's ruthlessness. The Soviet leader sometimes appreciated Hitler's brutality, too

GETTY IMAGES

Crucially, the majority of those who died because of Stalin's actions were Soviet citizens, while the majority killed by Hitler were non-Germans. This difference follows from their respective ambitions. Stalin was focused on repression within Soviet territory for most of his time in power, while Hitler dreamed of creating a huge new empire. In that context, it is a common misconception to think that German Jews made up substantial numbers of those who died. In fact, less than 1 per cent of Germans were Jews. It was the countries that the Nazis invaded – in particular Poland, Hungary and the Soviet Union – that contained large Jewish populations.

This geographical distribution of the deaths demonstrates one further variant between the two tyrants. Hitler's view was that Germany's only chance of long-term survival was to grow bigger – much bigger. As a result of his desire for German expansion, and his steadfast belief in racist ideology, he played the leading role in three of the most consequential decisions ever taken: the decision to invade Poland, which led to the Second World War; the decision to invade Stalin's Soviet Union and launch a "war of extermination"; and the decision to murder the Jews.

As for Stalin, while he did not completely abandon the idea of exporting the revolution to other lands, he had no immense plan of conquest. The European countries that came under his control after 1945 suffered this fate only in the wake of Hitler's defeat. And the territory Stalin snatched in eastern Poland and elsewhere in 1939 and 1940 he gained only as a consequence of the Molotov/Ribbentrop pact, which divided eastern Europe up into 'spheres of influence' between Germany and the Soviet Union.

Nonetheless – despite their many differences – what united Hitler and Stalin was their desire to create a paradise here on Earth. And because both dictators promised their vast numbers of willing followers that there was a glorious world awaiting them in the future, the problems of the now could be brushed aside as the price of the perfect life of tomorrow. But that tomorrow never came.

Most appalling of all, Hitler and Stalin were prepared to kill millions of people in pursuit of their dreams. And, as a consequence, their actions are a reminder – for all time – of the destruction that tyrants with utopian visions can inflict upon the world. H

Laurence Rees's new book, *Hitler and Stalin: The Tyrants and the Second World War*, was published by Viking in October. He will be discussing his book on 26 November, as part of our virtual lecture series. *historyextra.com/events/virtual-lecture*

Long to reign over us

"Giving life to people, killing people: those are the powers a ruler has." So wrote Qing dynasty emperor Kangxi, whose 61-year reign (1661–1722) is the longest in Chinese history

BRIDGEMAN

The voices of CHINA

Michael Wood, who's written a new history of China, taps into a civilisation's extraordinary past through the writings of five of its people – from the historian facing terrible persecution 2,000 years ago to the righteous anger of a 20th-century feminist

THE SOLDIER

1 "How many of us will be wounded no one knows"

Heifu, an ordinary soldier writing two millennia ago, describes war, rebellions – and cut-price cloth

China was united by the fearsome First Emperor, Qin Shi Huangdi, in 221 BC. His relentless power was symbolised by the Terracotta Army guarding his tomb: impassive, regimented, unquestioningly obedient to his authority.

But, recently, stunning documentary finds have given us a picture of the real-life troops of the First Emperor: soldiers' letters that bring to mind the Vindolanda tablets, written by Roman troops posted near Hadrian's Wall. Take this from 6 April 223 BC, in which the brothers Heifu and Jing send greetings to their family back home: "Our unit is about to help in attacks on rebel cities at Huaiyang in Henan. How long it will take, and how many of us will be captured or wounded no one knows…"

But then Heifu becomes delightfully personal: "Now when you get this letter, mum, look in Anlu for silk cloth that is cheap. If there is some that can be made into an unlined skirt and shirt, can you make that and send it with the cash? If the cloth is too dear, just send the cash and I'll make the clothes myself with hemp cloth. How are auntie, sister Kangle and Aunt Gushu? Is the marriage taking place?" These remarkable new finds are among the earliest voices of ordinary Chinese people left to us today.

A member of the 8,000-strong Terracotta Army guarding the First Emperor, Qin Shi Huangdi, at the city of Xi'an

Books are burned and scholars put to death in this artwork depicting life in the third century BC. The tension between autocracy and Confucian ideals has been a defining theme of Chinese history

ALAMY

THE HISTORIAN

2 "A man has only one death. It all depends how he uses it"

Sima Qian's 2,000-year-old letter reveals the terrible dilemmas facing historians who spoke truth to power

There has been a continuous tradition of historical writing in China for more than 2,500 years. Historians wrote the official narrative, but they also expressed moral judgments on good and bad rule. Hence the tyrannical First Emperor ordered history books to be burned and the historians buried alive, "fearing the power of the past to discredit the present".

Sima Qian (c145–c86 BC) lived during the Han dynasty, a century or so after the book burnings. His father, the keeper of the imperial calendar, had been working on the

ALAMY

Sima Qian's *Records of the Grand Historian* has established him as the greatest historian of China

lost history of pre-Qin China, and on his deathbed he made his son swear to complete it. Unfortunately, Sima fell foul of Emperor Wu Di, by speaking up for a man he believed had been wrongly accused. Furious, the emperor condemned Sima, who was expected to kill himself – after all, the only other option was to accept castration, and become a 'non-person'.

But, because of his oath to his father, Sima couldn't take the 'gentleman's path', and he explained why in one of the most famous letters in Chinese literature, addressed to a friend. "Before I had finished my rough draft, I met with this calamity. It is because it had not been finished that I submitted to the extreme penalty without rancour. When I have completed this work, if it may be handed down to people who will appreciate it and be read in great cities and villages, then though I should suffer a thousand mutilations, what regret should I have? A man has only one death. That death may be as weighty as Mount Tai or as light as a goose feather. It all depends upon the way he uses it."

We should be grateful that Sima continued with his endeavour. His reconstruction of the centuries of pre-Qin history was one of the greatest intellectual undertakings in Chinese culture, the foundation of all chronological inquiries into Chinese prehistory. And the staggering archaeological discoveries of the 20th century have proved that his order of the kings of the prehistoric dynasties was accurate.

One of the most thrilling passages of Sima's entire history is his description of the First Emperor's tomb. "They dug down deep to underground springs, pouring copper for the outer casing of the coffin," he tells us. "Workmen were instructed to make automatic crossbows primed to shoot at intruders… After the funeral ceremonies, the inner passages and doorways were blocked, and the exit sealed, trapping the workers and craftsmen inside. None could escape."

The tomb is still there, of course, guarded by the Terracotta Army. Tantalisingly, the inner tomb still awaits investigation, its contents arguably the greatest archaeological mystery in the world.

THE POET

3 "How much worse is the life of the common man?"

The poet Du Fu described the horrors that war inflicted on ordinary Chinese, including himself

China has the oldest continuous poetic tradition in the world. The *Book of Songs*, a wonderful anthology of love, war, agriculture and festivals, goes back to the 11th century BC, before the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.

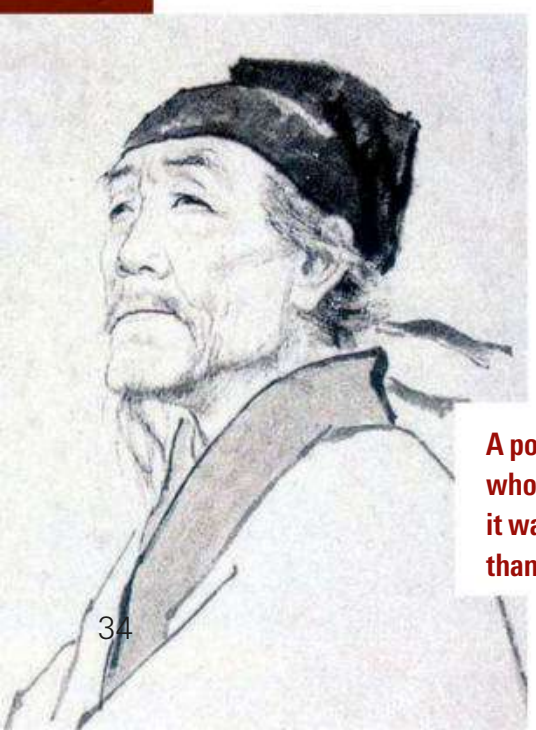
Poets have always been right at the centre of the civilisation – the voices and the conscience of China. Du Fu (AD 712–70) is considered to be the greatest. "There's Dante, there's Shakespeare and there's Du Fu," says Harvard professor Stephen Owen. "They are the poets who helped create the emotional vocabulary of their cultures."

Du Fu lived in the Tang dynasty (AD 618–907), one of the most brilliant epochs in the story of civilisation. But in his forties a century of peace and high culture crumbled in the face of corruption, environmental disaster and rebellion. As many as 30 million people died of war, famine or disease, or became refugees.

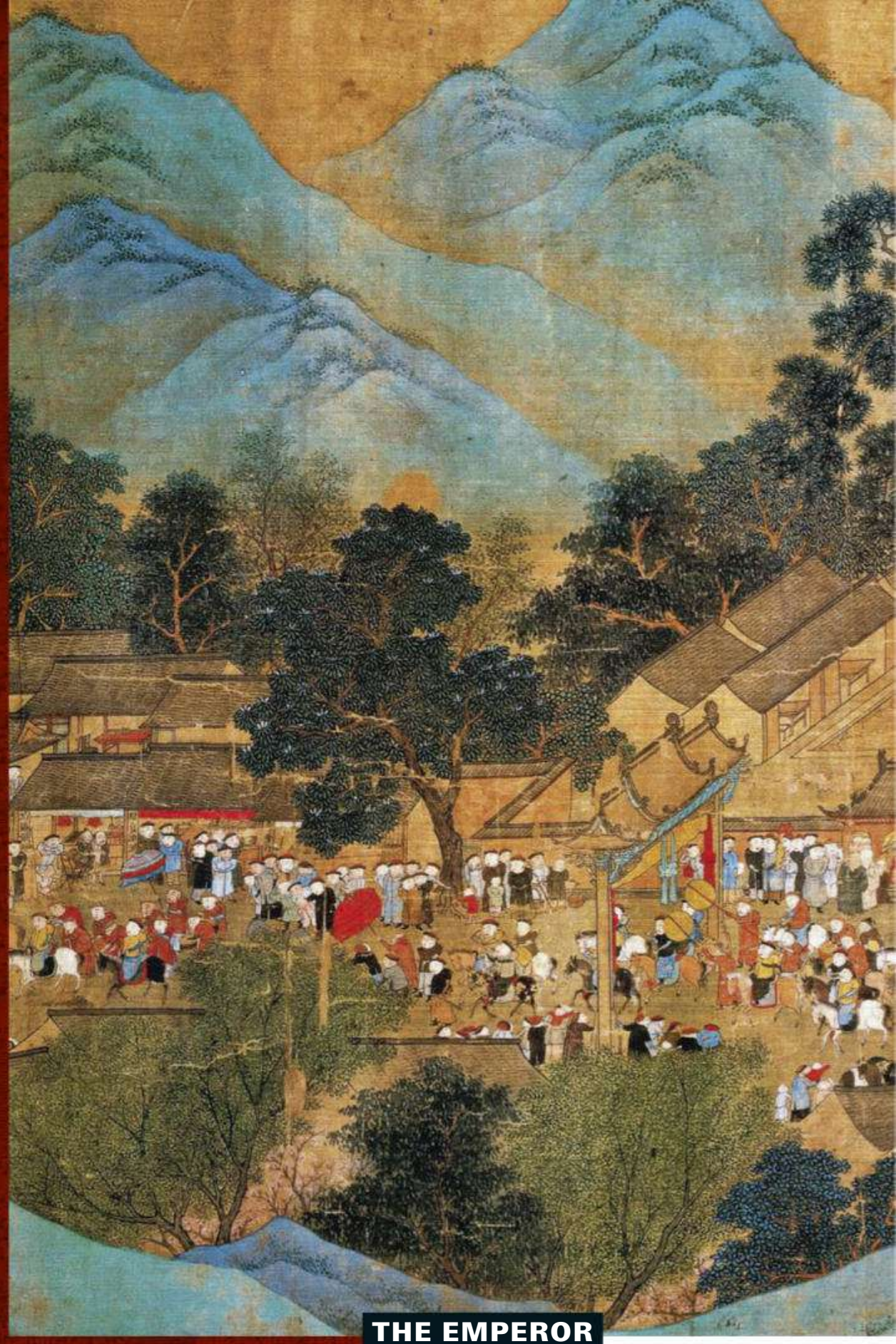
A minor civil servant, Du Fu himself became a refugee and experienced what we see on our screens today in the horrors of Yemen or Syria. He wrote of the patience of ordinary people, their betrayal by corrupt rulers. In his portraits of people who had lost everything, you find hints of Kipling's ventriloquy of the common soldier, or the tragic sense of destiny you get from the First World War poets – of the old world gone and a new world waiting to be born. During the war, when he trudges home half frozen, to find his baby son has died, he becomes Everyman:

"I am ashamed of being a father;
So poor that I caused my son to starve to death....
And I am one of the privileged.
If my life is so bitter
Then how much worse is the life of the common man?"

Du Fu died in obscurity, but his poetry has endured. And that's because, more than any other poet, he expressed what it was to be Chinese in his love of friendship and family, and his belief in Confucian morality (virtue, kindness and benevolence) through thick and thin.



A portrait of Du Fu, who "captured what it was to be Chinese more than any other poet"



Emperor Kangxi tours his kingdom in 1699, as depicted in a contemporary illustration. During Kangxi's reign the Chinese empire expanded into Mongolia, Xinjiang and Tibet

THE EMPEROR

4 "Act as a father to the people"

The ageing emperor Kangxi's maxims on good leadership echoed down the centuries

It goes without saying that China's story has been fundamentally shaped by the men who ruled it. And no man ruled longer than the Qing dynasty emperor Kangxi, who lived from 1654 to 1722. The Qing oversaw a massive expansion into Mongolia, Xinjiang and the protectorate of Tibet, giving us the shape of China today, the biggest unitary empire in history. Such a huge realm took enormous energy to rule, and Kangxi was famous for burning the midnight oil.

ALAMY

"Giving life to people, killing people: those are the powers a ruler has," he wrote – though, where he could, he took great pains over the justice enacted in his name.

Such was Kangxi's influence that his famous 'Sixteen Maxims' for civic values were still recited in villages in the 20th century, 200 years after his death. "Before I die I am letting you know my sincerest feelings," he reflected in his memos on the subject of leadership near the end of his 61-year reign. "Be kind to men from afar and keep the able ones near… Be considerate to officials and act as a father to the people; Protect the state before danger appears and govern well before there is any disturbance; Be always diligent and always careful, and maintain the balance between principle and expedience, so that long-range plans can be made for the country. That is all there is to it!"

ALAMY

THE FEMINIST

5 "We must abolish the rule of men"

In one of the great tracts of feminism, He Zhen was clear how best to right the wrongs of her nation

The feminist He Zhen (pictured above) campaigned for change at the very moment the suffragettes were agitating for the vote in Britain

Politics are at the very heart of Chinese civilisation. Where the focus of Indian civilisation and literature is spiritual and metaphysical, China's is political. The state is not only a historical fact but an imaginal construct that has permeated people's lives, minds and dreams for millennia.

Since the time of the First Emperor there has been a tension between the perceived necessity of harsh authoritarian rule and the desire for moral government based on humane, Confucian ideals. In the late 19th century, reformers attempted to do away with autocracy, and many different trajectories for the future emerged, some calling for revolutionary change. One of them was feminism. The star writer was Qiu Jin (executed for sedition in 1907) who famously asked: "Why can't women be heroes too?" Less well known is the mysterious He Zhen.

Born around 1884, He Zhen wrote at the very moment the suffragettes were fighting for the vote in Britain. Among recently rediscovered works is her essay *On the Question of Women's Liberation*, published in 1907, which now looks like one of the great tracts of feminism.

"For thousands of years the world has been dominated by the rule of man," she observed. "This rule is marked by class disjunctions in which men – and men only – exert proprietary rights. To rectify these wrongs, we must first abolish the rule of men and introduce equality among human beings… And the goal of equality cannot be achieved except through women's liberation."

He Zhen's later life is a blank. Some said she had a breakdown, despairing of politics. Others claimed she dropped out and became a Buddhist nun. Did she see more of China's 20th-century tragedies? If only we knew. H

Michael Wood's latest book, *The Story of China: A Portrait of a Civilisation and its People*, was published by Simon & Schuster in September. He will be giving a lecture on Chinese history at our virtual event on 22 December. *historyextra.com/events/virtual-lecture*

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"This was the most disastrous moment in British maritime history"

On the 900th anniversary of the White Ship disaster, **Charles Spencer**, author of a new book on the tragedy, and medieval historian **Dan Jones** discuss how it rocked the English monarchy

ALAMY/JOHN WATTS ROBERTSON/STEVE SAYERS

Dan Jones: Your new book concerns one of the most dramatic events in the Middle Ages, that's the sinking of the White Ship in 1120 – nine centuries ago. It's been described as the medieval *Titanic*, but you argue in the book that it's even more meaningful in the course of history. Can we begin with what happened in November 1120?

Charles Spencer: On the night of 25 November 1120, something cataclysmic happened to the English royal family. On the White Ship were 300 people, among them some of the most important figures in Anglo-Norman society. And the most important by a very long way was the sole legitimate male heir to King Henry I.

Henry is the backbone of this story. It's a true-life Greek tragedy where a king has, over 20 years, seized the throne, built up a system of government that works, and quelled all sorts of problems. He's already started to hand over power to his heir, William the Ætheling, who's the designated king and Duke of Normandy for the next generation.

William got on board the ship, partied like crazy with his friends for several hours, and got everyone drunk on board, including, unfortunately, the helmsman. And so about one nautical mile outside Barfleur, the White Ship, one of the finest ships of its age, hit a rock. And there was one survivor, so we know what happened in the water as people struggled to survive.

What sort of king was Henry I?

Henry is one of the most interesting historical figures I've ever come across because his is such a human story. As the fourth son of William the Conqueror, he was an obscure figure who was destined to be a well-bred non-entity. Yet he became a titan of European history in the first 35 years of the 12th century.

He was a very effective medieval king in that he kept the peace: for the last 29 years of his reign in England, nobody kept a castle against him or rose in rebellion. People said that a young girl laden with treasure could walk from one end of the kingdom to the other without being held up. And that was an incredible thing for a king to give to his people, that level of peace. Henry also had a very clear idea about finance, and formed the Exchequer, the name of which survives to this day.

So Henry was an effective ruler, which is what people craved. And he knew the importance of having an established, acknowledged heir, because that was the one person who could bring about order. If you didn't have that, then you opened the gates of hell.

So this brings us on to William the Ætheling, Henry's only legitimate son. Henry had more than 20 children but only two of them were legitimate: one boy and one girl, William and Matilda. Tell us about William the Ætheling – this strange word, what does it mean, and what was Henry's plan for him?

'Ætheling' is an odd Anglo-Saxon term that means that you are eligible to be king. For William, it was the equivalent of the heir apparent, because there was no one else – he was the only legitimate male son.

Henry was a loving father who invested all his hopes in this boy, and we know from the chroniclers that he took great care with him. For four years before the White Ship sank, Henry had been fighting Louis VI to get the French king to acknowledge his son as Duke of Normandy. And Henry took his son to diplomatic events where he was arguing for his right to be the duke. He was grooming him to be his heir in a very thoughtful way, engaging him in things as a young man.

And what do we know about William? What's difficult is that all the sources are ecclesiastical writers, and of course they see the hand of God in everything. When William died in the White Ship, people were looking for God's reason for doing this. For somebody to be deprived of a magnificent future must mean that God didn't like him. I found a lot of chroniclers were saying how spoilt and obnoxious he was. There was a story that he viewed the Anglo-Saxons as a sort of *Untermensch* – a species not quite as good as the Normans – and that he'd promised, when he was king, to put them to the yoke. But it's hard to tell how true this is.

We know that William was the centre of a hard-living aristocratic group, which is sort of inevitable if you're a teenage king-to-be. He loved fine clothes, and apparently, he was a handsome boy, although again, for the chroniclers, if you were royal, you tended to be either beautiful or handsome.

William must have been flattered by the attention of the crew of the White Ship, who were absolutely thrilled to have him as their passenger. And in return for their adulation, he bought the crew three barrels of wine for them to enjoy with his friends.

So let's get into the detail of the sinking. Why were William and Henry in Barfleur? And what was this White Ship? Why was William sailing on it?

Henry was in Barfleur because it was the favourite port at which to embark from Normandy to England – for anyone of note, really. In good weather, it was a 10 to 12-hour journey and it was very easy. Henry had spent four years campaigning against Louis VI and he'd finally won the war, he'd had his son acknowledged by his great enemy. So he arrived in Barfleur in triumph.

Henry already had the ship that always took him back home. But then the captain of the White Ship came forward and tried to give Henry a tribute in return for him changing his mind and going on his ship. The man also pointed out that it would be his honour to take the king back because it had been his father's great privilege to captain the *Mora*, which was William the Conqueror's flagship on the invasion of England in 1066. But Henry was fixed in his ways and said: "No, I'm actually fine but it'd be enormous fun for my son and his friends [and a couple of Henry's illegitimate children]" to go on the White Ship.

The White Ship was obviously a very special ship to look at. There was still a huge crossover from Viking to Norman culture at this time and the ships hadn't evolved much

Life cut short William the Ætheling, Henry I's son and heir. Chroniclers believed that, as William was denied a magnificent future, God disapproved of him

PREVIOUS PAGE:
The White Ship disaster, as depicted in a 14th-century manuscript. "It's an extraordinary thing for one ship to bring such calamity to a nation," says Charles Spencer

BRIDGEMAN

Henry's triumph
A depiction of the 1119 battle of Brémule, which ended in victory for Henry I over France's Louis VI. But just a year later Henry's fortunes dramatically changed

BNF GALLICA

from those in the Bayeux Tapestry. They were Clinker built, meaning one plank was put across the next, and they were then hammered together. And they were very fast.

So it was a large Viking ship and it had a particularly large crew of oarsmen. We know from a speech of the captain that she must have been white, and I think she would have been lime-washed, rather than painted white.

From the list of passengers, it's clear that it was a gang, a clique, who got together on there. The most powerful earl in England, Richard, Earl of Chester, got on board with his entourage and it seems the main body of aristocrats on the ship were connected to him. There were also two of Henry's greatest knights on board and 18 women who had the rank of countess or princess.

So it was chock-full of the most important people in Anglo-Norman society, as well as 50 members of the crew. They had a rip-roaring party ashore: the crew got drunk, the passengers got drunk and then right at the last minute, one or two of the passengers got off because they were worried about the state of the crew.

"William the Ætheling was at the centre of a hard-living aristocratic group, which is sort of inevitable if you're a teenage king-to-be"

And then some monks come to the ship…
In one chapter I write about Anglo-Norman attitudes towards the sea. And of course, people didn't know anything much about it except it was sometimes very beautiful and often very dangerous. They didn't know what was under the waves. If you look at the poetry or maps from the time, the sea is full of terrifying species: sea goats, sea elephants – think of any animal and it has a devilish counterpoint under the waves.

Drowning was considered the most painful way to die. One way of countering this was getting God's blessing before you sailed and it was common, with an important ship like this, for monks or priests to come and bless it. Unfortunately, on this occasion, the passengers were so drunk that when the monks turned up, they were chased away. Later, the chroniclers saw this as inviting the doom that came along. The ship probably set

sail just before midnight. A large crowd watched them go: some were relatives of people who were sailing, but others just wanted to have a good look at this glamorous bunch of people on one ship. And then they pushed out to sea.

The helmsman was from Barfleur and knew the area very well, but he was drunk, and the sail was dropped too soon. They were going at a hell of a speed: the rowers bending their backs to try to catch up with the king who had set off a few hours before.

There's a big rock, which you really would expect to avoid, called the Quillebeuf. And they hit it at full speed. I think they had gone so fast in that one mile from the harbour, that the helmsman hadn't realised quite how far out they were.

They hit it extremely hard and the sailors used hooks to try to push the boat clear, but all they did is make it worse. And these sailors were the first casualties – they got washed away. The planks started to open up and once one opens, there's no plan B: you're open to the sea then.

And they were only a mile from land?
Interestingly, the people of Barfleur heard a big cry, but they just assumed that the party had gone up a notch on the ship and they went home, thinking nothing of it. So it was the middle of the night and nobody knew what had happened, even though the ship was only a mile away.

I try to bring in a little bit of modern science to work out what happened. First of all, I don't think anyone could swim – very, very few people could swim at this time – but the real killer that night was the cold and there is a scientific thing called cold-water shock. If you are immersed in very cold water suddenly, you will gulp in water and your muscles become uncontrollable. Most of the people on board will have died very quickly, especially as they were wearing heavy clothes to counter the cold of a November night.

Were there lifeboats?
There was one lifeboat. There were bodyguards on board, and they bundled William the Ætheling into the one rowing boat and started to get him away. But there's this moment that has always haunted anyone who knows the story, where William's sister, Margaret of Perche (one of Henry's illegitimate daughters), sees William escaping and starts screaming for him to come back. She insulted his manhood for leaving his sister to die. And William ordered his crew to turn the boat around to go and get her. But there were so many people thrashing around for their life in the water, and when they saw this rowing boat, they tried to clamber on board and the boat went down.

Depths of despair A 14th-century manuscript shows Henry I in mourning on his throne, above an image of the White Ship. The king was crushed by news of the death of three of his children in the sinking

> **"The prince went back to rescue his sister but the rowing boat was dragged under by people thrashing around in the water"**

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There were just a handful of survivors at this stage. One of them is a fantastic figure, Berold the butcher, from Rouen, who was the humblest man on board, apart from the crew. He had scrambled onto a bit of broken mast with a man called de l'Aigle who came from an aristocratic fighting family. The captain of the ship swam to them and said: "Where's the king's son?" They told him the news, and the captain knew that Henry was not one to be trifled with, so he allowed himself to die because he didn't want to be the one to explain what had happened to Henry's three children who had died. He just let himself drift under and was never seen again.

So the ship went down, William the Ætheling went down, and Berold the butcher survived to tell the story, which is how we know the dramatic details. When did Henry find out that he'd lost his legitimate son, two of his illegitimate children, and, beyond that, his whole plan for the Anglo-Norman realm?
People quickly knew something had gone wrong with the White Ship because it was a clear night and there was no possible explanation except that it had sunk. Then the confirmation came when Berold was discovered the next morning by a fisherman. The news reached southern England within a day, but nobody wanted to tell Henry because, even on a good day, he was terrifying, and he loved his children.

All the courtiers had relatives or friends who they knew had drowned, but they tried to hide their sorrow from the king, so he didn't ask them about it. Eventually, the courtiers persuaded a young boy to tell Henry what had happened. The boy went in, fell on the ground and spewed out this terrible news. And Henry bellowed and fell down on the ground in shock and despair.

He was completely devastated, went into denial and ordered the coast to be checked in case the White Ship was somewhere else. And when he realised that it was true and he'd lost all these people who were the cornerstone of his ambitions, he took to bed and didn't eat for a very long time. This went on until one of his closest confidants told him that all this crying wasn't going to bring

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Fighting talk Stephen of Blois (centre) issues orders to his army during the Anarchy. William the Ætheling's death on the White Ship produced a succession crisis that triggered a chaotic 19-year civil war

William back and was just going to make his enemies stronger. Crying, he said, is for women, not for kings, and you've got to get on with it. And Henry did get up, and actually lived another 15 years.

Fifteen years seems ample opportunity for Henry to marry again – as he does, to Adeliza of Louvain – and produce another legitimate heir. But he doesn't do that, so that leaves him with one legitimate child: Matilda. Can you tell us about her?
Matilda had a conventional life, up until this point. She was married off to the Holy Roman Emperor Henry V in Germany and it was a huge moment for Henry I to have his daughter acknowledged as effectively the empress of central Europe. She was brought up in a different way of royal governance: when her husband was off fighting wars, she was left with real power. She was not just an adjunct to the king – she was a proper regent.

And then the emperor died of cancer, and Matilda went back to her father. She was now an incredibly eligible heiress and Henry used her for his dynastic purposes: he persuaded her to marry a much younger man, Geoffrey, who was the son of the Count of Anjou.

It was difficult for Matilda to swallow this. First of all, she was marrying a boy, while she was a woman. And secondly, she was being downgraded to a countess. But she did it for

ALAMY/GETTY IMAGES

Up against it Matilda, daughter of Henry I, in a 14th-century manuscript. Few contemporaries were inclined to take a woman's claim to the throne seriously

her father. Henry needed to disable the House of Anjou, because they'd been allied with France against him.

So instead of producing another heir, Henry decided to load the future of his realm onto his daughter. He forced the barons to swear homage to her. This is extraordinary, isn't it? In a patriarchal age, what was a political wizard like Henry thinking in loading all this on to Matilda?
Henry was, in our parlance, as sexist as anyone and he did make a distinction. After about six years of not producing a child with his second wife, he announced to his lords that the White Ship had been a national catastrophe and had deprived him of his heir. But he would like them all to acknowledge Matilda as his successor. Being a successor was very different to being an heir. What Henry was asking was for people to be loyal to her, to recognise her as queen, but really, she was a stepping stone, dynastically. By the time Henry died, she had some sons – the eldest one called Henry – and the king was really trying to use her as somebody to pass on the baton to his grandson. But he couldn't do that without having her made queen.

Henry was completely transfixed by the problem of his succession and it dominated his last 15 years. But when he died, he must have thought: "Well, I've dealt with that," because the leading bishops, abbots and aristocracy, in England and Normandy, had sworn to recognise his wish and Matilda was going to become queen.

But it's a staggering thing – and it says so much about the role of women in society at the time – that as soon as Henry died, few people bothered to even think about that. And Henry's nephew, Stephen of Blois (who was one of those who had got off the White Ship in Barfleur), raced for the crown. He was a popular chap, a good warrior, and, crucially, male, and he snapped up the crown with all sorts of promises that he didn't observe.

Stephen was okay for the first years of his reign, but then Matilda arrived in 1139 with an army and a proper civil war began. [That civil war, now known as the Anarchy, saw Stephen and Matilda vying for the English throne for 19 years. The conflict was effectively brought to an end by the Treaty of Wallingford (1153), which decreed that Stephen could retain the throne until his death on condition that the crown then passed to Matilda's son, Henry.]

The upshot is that, against all odds, the long dead Henry I got his way, didn't he?
Henry's grandson became Henry II and so it all came good – but after utter chaos. The Anarchy was aptly named. It was a complete bloodbath. It was about as tumultuous a time as Britain's ever suffered and it all stemmed from the sinking of one ship.

That's why I maintain that this was the most disastrous moment in British maritime history. Yes, the *Titanic* is remarkable in its scale and the glamour of the people on board, but this was an entire royal family destroyed. It's an extraordinary thing for one ship to bring such calamity to a nation. H

Charles Spencer is an author and former journalist who has written bestselling history books, including *Killers of the King: The Men Who Dared to Execute Charles I* (Bloomsbury, 2014). His latest book is *The White Ship* (William Collins, 2020)

Dan Jones is a historian and broadcaster who has written numerous bestselling books of medieval history, most recently *Crusaders: An Epic History of the Wars for the Holy Lands* (Head of Zeus, 2019)

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BBC HISTORY MAGAZINE

The colonial secrets of Britain's stately homes

They're the very epitome of the English rural idyll. Yet behind the majestic architecture lies a history with powerful ties to imperialism – and the slave trade. **Corinne Fowler**, founder of the Colonial Countryside research project, considers the controversy swirling around country houses' pasts

ALAMY/ NATIONAL TRUST IMAGES – ANDREAS VON EINSIEDEL, DENNIS GILBERT

CHANGING LANDSCAPES

1 One of the tunnels at Uppark House in West Sussex, where servants were hidden from the view of 'polite society'

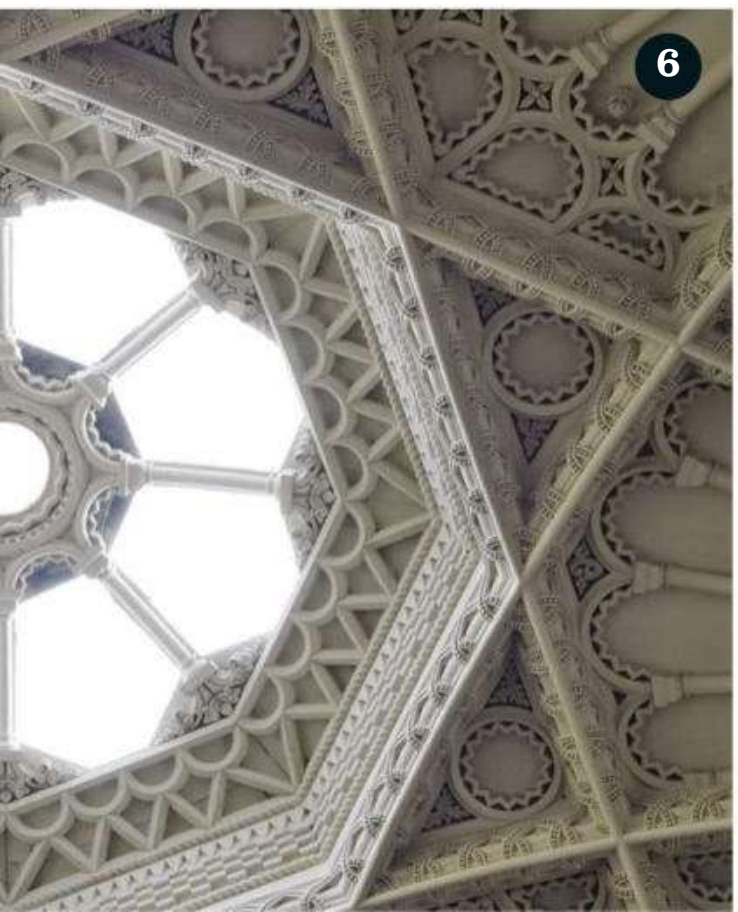
2 In the 17th century, Dyrham Park was owned by the man responsible for making England's colonies profitable

3 Calke Abbey's colonial acquisitions include a Tibetan skull cap, a broken mosque tile and an African thumb piano

4 In the 18th century, Kenwood House was home to Dido Elizabeth Belle, the daughter of an enslaved African woman

5 A portrait of Sir Francis Drake. The intelligence provided by a west African called Diego helped the English adventurer acquire the riches that funded his purchase of Buckland Abbey 7

6 The skylight in Penrhyn Castle's grand staircase. The Penryhn estate has been described as a "slavery landscape"



Seat of power Hardwick Hall near Chesterfield. This Elizabethan country house has numbered among its residents a governor-general of India and secretary of state for the colonies

Before daybreak the crew of Francis Drake's ship heard the shouts of a man who wanted to come aboard. The man was named Diego and he had been born in west Africa. It was 1572 and Drake's ship was anchored off the coast of Panama. As Miranda Kaufmann writes in her book *Black Tudors*, Diego had formerly been enslaved by the Spanish before fleeing and offering information about their silver and gold to Drake. The English explorer happily used this information to his advantage and, with Diego at his side, captured treasures that delighted his queen, Elizabeth I, and made him a very rich man. This treasure helped to pay off part of England's national debt, while Drake bought Buckland Abbey with his newfound wealth.

Over the four and a half centuries since Drake moved into his grand new residence on the edge of Dartmoor, Buckland Abbey has been readily incorporated into an idealised version of Britain's stately homes. Nostalgia about our country houses has a long pedigree. They feature prominently in Britain's pastoral literary tradition in which shepherds discuss work, love and the countryside. Poets like Philip Sidney, John Milton and Alexander Pope eulogised the countryside in which these estates sat, hailing it as an anglicised version of the 'Arcadia' of Virgil and the 'Idylls' of Theocritus.

The pastoral tradition established an idea of the countryside as a place of escape and a repository of Englishness. Country houses were central to this imagery.

Yet the rural idyll was always an elaborate fiction. Landscape design played on this idea and it still does. The subterranean passages of places like Derbyshire's Calke Abbey and Uppark in West Sussex hid servants from view. Country houses' tranquil grounds contrasted sharply with the wars and enslaved labour that enabled the flow of colonial wealth. How many people know how Francis Drake raised the money to buy Buckland?

Slavery landscape

Edward Colston's statue was toppled from its plinth in central Bristol by Black Lives Matter protesters in June 2020. It wasn't long before the historical spotlight fell on Britain's verdant country estates. Awkward questions already being asked of stately homes were now suddenly posed with greater urgency.

Stately homes are not conventionally associated with colonialism. But a 2007 report into English Heritage houses built during the period of transatlantic slavery uncovered abundant links. These ranged from slave-trading and plantation ownership to insuring slave-ships and buying shares in the South Sea and Royal African Companies whose business was selling enslaved people. The historian Stephanie Barczewski found that, between 1700 and 1930, more than a thousand landed estates were bought, built and improved by colonial merchants, plantation owners and military officers who had served in the British colonies.

The tranquil grounds contrasted sharply with the enslaved labour that enabled the flow of colonial wealth

But colonial wealth didn't just manifest itself in the sumptuous architecture of Britain's country estates. It also transformed the country's local economies and regional industries. For example, the roads and ports near Bangor in north Wales were funded by Jamaican sugar plantations worked by enslaved Africans. This is why the historian Marian Gwyn describes the vast Penrhyn estate as a "slavery landscape". The Denbigh plantation in Clarendon, Jamaica was owned by the Pennant family from the second half of the 17th century. This money funded the construction of Penrhyn Castle *and* Penrhyn slate quarry, which saw a bitter industrial dispute over unionisation, pay and working conditions.

Propertied families were also involved in colonial administration. In the 17th century, Dyrham Park, a few miles east of Bristol, belonged to the surveyor and auditor general of Plantations Revenues, William Blathwayt. His job was to make England's colonies profitable. Country houses were sometimes owned by successive generations of colonial bureaucrats: family members at Derbyshire's Hardwick Hall served as governor-general of India, secretary of state for the colonies and parliamentary under secretary for India and Burma.

The Downton Effect

Before Covid-19 struck, country houses had become major leisure destinations. English Heritage sites had more than 10 million visitors each year and the National Trust has more than 5 million members. This surge in country houses' popularity was termed 'the Downton Effect', named after the television

ALAMY

World view
A detail of the wallpaper in the Chinese bedroom at Felbrigg House in Norfolk. "Visitors can't fail to notice the global character of country houses – it's there in their collections," writes Corinne Fowler

Star quality
Highclere Castle, the epicentre of the 'Downton Effect'. The Hampshire estate – where the hit ITV drama *Downton Abbey* was filmed – attracted 1,600 visitors a day before Covid-19 hit

Blood money
A scene from the slave trade, as depicted by John Raphael Smith in 1791. Between 1700 and 1930, people with links to colonialism bought, built and improved more than a thousand landed estates

NATIONAL TRUST IMAGES – CHRIS LACEY/ ALAMY/BRIDGEMAN

IMPERIAL HISTORIES

Three stately homes with colonial connections

1. Basildon Park and ‘England’s Hindoostan’

So many East India Company men settled in Berkshire in the 18th century that it became known as ‘England’s Hindoostan’. One of those men, Sir Francis Sykes, made his fortune collecting Indian taxes with the help of an Indian merchant named Cantoo Baboo, and in the late 1770s he used that fortune to commission the building of a grand Palladian residence near the river Thames, Basildon Park.

For years, Sir Francis Sykes was assisted by Baboo, who won his trust, and of whom Sykes wrote: “I never hided anything from him.”

Sykes’s descendent Sir John Sykes has researched his family’s connection to India for 40 years. He found that the lasting alliance between the families of Baboo and Sykes is expressed in details such as a barrel of mango chutney which was shipped at great expense from Bengal to Basildon Park. Such details remind us how East India Company ventures, often violent, transformed British tastes.

This image from 1790 is thought to depict Cantoo Baboo, a merchant who managed the Indian business affairs of the first owner of Basildon Park, Sir Francis Sykes

2. A bad business at Speke Hall

Speke Hall is a lovely Tudor manor house in south-east Liverpool. It is also a site with strong links to the slave trade, courtesy of a local merchant named Richard Watt. Watt traded in enslaved Africans, invested in slave-ships, and exported rum and sugar from plantations in Jamaica. These business interests made him a very wealthy man – wealthy enough, in 1795, to buy Speke Hall.

Watt’s relatives inherited his fortune and Richard Watt V used that money to restore the hall, which had fallen into disrepair. The house was eventually inherited by Adelaide Watt who left it to the National Trust.

Speke House’s connections to the slave trade are little to be seen in the house itself, but are scattered through-out Liverpool. Watt’s money funded Bluecoat School and you can find a list of enslaved people belonging to Richard Watt III at the International Slavery Museum.

In 1795, Speke Hall was purchased by Richard Watt, who owned Jamaican sugar plantations and exported rum and sugar from Jamaica

3. The mysterious Belle of Kenwood House

A 1779 painting at Kenwood House depicts a black woman, Dido Elizabeth Belle, alongside her white cousin, Elizabeth Murray. For years it was assumed that Dido, who stands behind Elizabeth in a yellow silk dress, was a servant. It was fashionable for wealthy people to have black servants during this period, and there are hundreds of similar portraits in European country houses.

Yet, as the Shakespearean actor Paterson Joseph recently observed, art historians in the 20th century routinely wrote about white sitters, and often named their pets, but referred to black subjects as “And Servant” or “And Negro”, and left it at that.

Further investigation into the Kenwood House painting revealed that Belle was the illegitimate daughter of an enslaved African woman and the nephew of Lord Chief Justice Mans-field, who took Belle into his household and left her some money when he died. Historic houses all over Britain contain paintings such as these. They reveal the rural presence of black people in the 17th and 18th centuries and the breadth of our multicultural origins.

The initial assumption that Dido Elizabeth Belle (left) was a servant of Elizabeth Murray (right) proved wide of the mark

NATIONAL TRUST-ANDREW BUTLER/ALAMY/ REPRODUCED WITH THE PERMISSION OF THE TRUSTEES OF VICTORIA MEMORIAL HALL, KOLKATA, INDIA

drama that was filmed at Highclere Castle, near Newbury. *Downton Abbey* swelled visitor numbers to the privately owned castle, which received nearly 1,600 people per day until the pandemic hit.

Before the Black Lives Matter protests, stately homes conventionally provided visitors with information about the *British* lives of landowners and, sometimes, their wives and servants. Yet much has changed. This summer, the National Trust declared that many of its places "have direct and indirect links to slavery and colonialism". The Trust's director of culture and engagement, John Orna-Ornstein, recently stated that "Black Lives Matter has absolutely made us realise that we need to move more quickly to address those histories and to be as open about them as possible".

This new approach is ethically and historically just, but is not universally welcomed. My 2019 survey of *Daily Mail* reader responses to previous attempts to talk about country houses' colonial links revealed a common objection: "The past is the past." As John Agard puts it in his poem *Mansfield Park Revisited*, slavery talk is unfamiliar amid "afternoon teas" and "well-laid cups". Nonetheless, three-quarters of respondents to a Policy Exchange survey conducted in June 2020 believe that the National Trust should do more to educate visitors about its links to slavery and colonialism.

Plundered treasures The wall panel, top, and gold and velvet slippers, above, are thought to have belonged to Tipu Sultan, ruler of Mysore. Since their capture by the East India Company in 1799, they have been displayed in Powis Castle

Talking about colonialism in country houses seems controversial precisely because the history is repressed

Misplaced curiosity

Talking about colonialism in country houses generates controversy precisely because the history is repressed. My 2019 survey also found that *Daily Mail* readers commonly asserted that history is "being rewritten". Yet there is irrefutable evidence that country houses have significant connections to people and places all over the world.

Visitors can't fail to notice the global character of country houses – it's there in the exotic woods, Chinese wallpapers and ivory carvings that fill their collections. What is less obvious is the stories of East India Company trading, colonial administration or enslavement that underpin them. For this reason, curators will need to provide clear evidence of the colonial connection to combat claims that they are making it all up.

Another challenge is presented by the ways in which previous generations displayed global objects, often betraying colonial insensitivities. In a 'cabinet of curios' at Calke Abbey in Derbyshire, a Tibetan skull cup rests beside a broken mosque tile, an African thumb piano and a plant specimen. For many years, the bodies of Tibet's dead were picked clean by birds in a sky burial and made into cups to remember the deceased. Yet at Calke Abbey this sacred object had merely been placed alongside other 'curiosities' from around the world.

Despite this, heritage organisations are increasingly keen to provide welcoming environments for people of colour. Last year, volunteers at Kedleston Hall were deeply affected when they saw a Sikh visitor in tears because he saw a sacred object wrongly described on an early 20th-century label in the 'Eastern Museum'.

Country houses' global collections matter to people all over the world. Indian admirers of Tipu Sultan, the ruler of Mysore, would love to one day be given the opportunity to see his slippers, tent, sword and throne-head. These items were captured by East India Company servants in 1799 and have been on display in Powis Castle ever since.

Previous attempts to address these challenges did not fundamentally change the landscape. Even when events and exhibitions were held throughout 2007 to mark the bicentenary of the Slave Trade Act (when Britain legally abolished the trade), they had little impact on country houses' core narratives.

Yet 2020 is not 2007. Even before Black Lives Matter, the sector was gradually transforming its presentation of country houses: the recent protests accelerated work that had already begun. It is a huge undertaking, requiring investment, research, training and collaboration.

And it is precisely because of this pressing need for change that I launched Colonial Countryside, a child-led project that works with historians and writers to explore and highlight country houses' connections to Africa, the Caribbean and the East India Company.

As one primary school participant exclaimed: "This is *interesting* history!" Her comment is significant, since the heritage sector has a role to play in providing the fullest possible account of country houses at a time when history is suffering as an academic subject. A 2018 survey by the Royal Historical Society found that depressingly little global history is being taught. The survey also found that students from black and minority ethnic backgrounds are under-represented in university history courses.

The British empire's fleeting appearance in the history curriculum does not do justice to the extent to which colonialism shaped the economic and political fortunes of millions of people worldwide – and changed the face of modern Britain. It has been hard for people schooled in this system to think beyond country houses' local significance.

Ultimately, though, the children of post-colonial Britain are accustomed to thinking more expansively, since so many of them have family connections to formerly colonised countries. They are correspondingly less likely to be patient with partisan thinking about the past. As a 12-year-old Colonial Countryside pupil, XazQ, observed: "Older people might not want to study this history but they can't stop me educating myself." H

Corinne Fowler is the author of *Green Unpleasant Land: Creative Responses to Rural England's Colonial Connections* (Peepal Tree Press, 2020). You can follow her research project, Colonial Countryside, on Twitter *@ColonialCountr1*

LISTEN To listen to Corinne Fowler discuss the Colonial Countryside project on the BBC Radio 3 programme **Arts & Ideas**, go to *bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/p07q19kk*

NATIONAL TRUST-ERIK PELHAM

A helmet from a chieftain's grave in 10th-century Norway. "Being a Viking was a lifestyle, a mindset and, above all, a choice," writes Neil Price

MARY EVANS/DREAMSTIME

Beyond the stereotype of the rampaging, blood-spattered raiders lay a sophisticated culture with highly developed ideas on identity, the supernatural and what it meant to be alive. **Neil Price** explores the Vikings' view of the world from five perspectives

Inside the Viking MIND

"I have gone with bloody blade where the ravens followed, and with screaming spear; Vikings fought fiercely. Raging we gave battle, fire ran through men's houses, I let bloody bodies sleep in town gateways."

Thus we see the celebrated 10th-century Icelandic warrior-poet Egill Skalla-Grímsson attempting to impress a woman at a feast (as related in his eponymous saga, here in Christine Fell's translation). There are ample reasons why the Viking Age (c750–1050 AD) earned the terrible but somehow stirring reputation that has engaged the public and academic imagination for centuries. But the truth is more complex.

Throughout the later 20th century, Viking scholars opened up the world of the early medieval Scandinavians beyond the violence. Academics embraced trade and travel, migration and colonisation, along with the sophistication of Viking art, poetry and material culture. (In fact, it could be argued that this almost went too far, until the Vikings' aggressive side all but disappeared from our histories). New archaeological discoveries have broadened the picture further still.

Over the past 20 years, yet another dimension of Vikings' lives has come into focus: the mind. As the five following examples demonstrate, the Viking psyche can be explored in many directions – encompassing their beliefs on the creation of the universe, their concept of the body and soul, how they defined gender, and their relationships with magic and religion. Even warfare, the key component of the Viking stereotype, had special qualities that set it apart. Violence and raiding remain very much a part of the picture, but they were strands alongside many others. It was but one element in a rich, multi-faceted tapestry of what it meant to be a person in the Viking Age.

A fifth/sixth-century gold pendant that may depict Odin, the god who, so Vikings believed, breathed life into the first humans

ALAMY

THE SENSE OF SELF

1 How life began on a beach

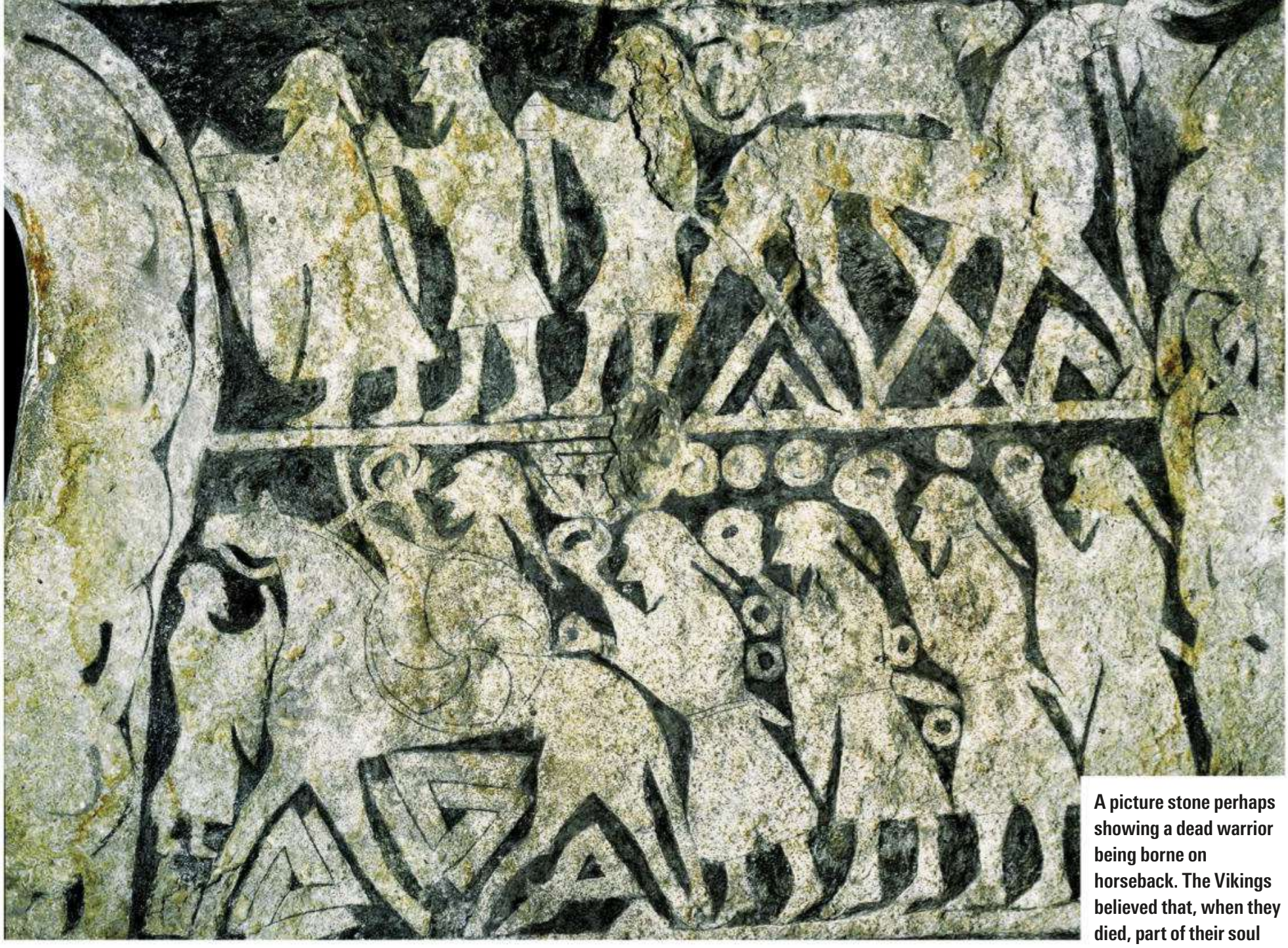
Perhaps the most profound shift in our understanding of the Vikings is at the most personal level of all: who, even what, they understood themselves to be. Any world-view presupposes a world to look out on, and for the Vikings that began with the creation of the universe.

The roots of Viking identity lay here, literally so, at the foot of Yggdrasil, the great ash tree that connected the nine worlds of gods, giants, the powers of darkness and the dead. Central to it all was Midgard, their name for *our* home and incidentally the inspiration for Tolkien's Middle Earth. The Norse myths tell of how the first human couple were created by the gods from stumps of driftwood found on the beach of the ocean that encircled Midgard. Odin and his brothers gave life, breath, sight, speech, hearing and, finally, intelligence and movement to a man, *Askr* (Ash), and a woman, *Embla* (Elm), who then ventured out into their shiny new world. For all the confusion that the Vikings sometimes inspired in those they encountered, the Scandinavians themselves were never in any doubt: they were the children of Ash and Elm. This is a vital starting point if we are to recover the Vikings' own viewpoint, the place from which they began.

Another major shift has come in the way researchers themselves view the Viking world, especially in the decades since the fall of the Iron Curtain, which acted as a near-impermeable barrier to scholarship. The notion of distinct 'western' and 'eastern' Viking Ages is now a thing of the past, and we can recognise a coherent, integrated world of travel and contact that ultimately stretched from the Asian steppe to the eastern American seaboard.

At the same time, what was once characterised as a Viking 'expansion' – the process by which large numbers of Scandinavians began to pour into the wider world from the late eighth century onwards – is now better understood as a 'diaspora', something much more haphazard, which unfolded in different ways in different times and places. In illuminating their motives, this too enlarges our understanding of the Viking mind.

Part of this new perspective is the realisation that not all 'Vikings' were even from Scandinavia, as people from all around the Baltic and further afield have been found in the burial grounds of settlements and army camps. Like the diasporas of later centuries, that of the Vikings drew on a broad catchment. Anyone walking the streets of their towns would have been immersed in a cosmopolitan babble of foreign accents and local dialects.



A picture stone perhaps showing a dead warrior being borne on horseback. The Vikings believed that, when they died, part of their soul continued down the family line

AKG/PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF JOHN LEE, NATIONAL MUSEUM OF DENMARK

THE BODY AND SOUL

2 Why every man contained a woman

If you met a Viking Age Scandinavian in the flesh, what you would have seen, literally, was their *hamr,* their 'shell' or 'shape', what for us is the body. This was one of four components – described by several of the Icelandic sagas and Old Norse poems – of what we might loosely call the soul.

Conceived as a container for other aspects of the person, the *hamr* was the physical manifestation of what somebody was, but, crucially, it could alter. This is where the concept of shape-changing comes from, in the sense that the actual structures of the body were believed to flow and shift. But not for everyone, only for the special few: those unusual men could become bears or wolves, while their female counterparts shifted into birds or water creatures.

Inside the 'shape' of a person was the second part of their being, the *hugr,* for which no modern translation really suffices. Combining elements of personality and temperament, the *hugr* was who someone really was, the absolute essence of you, free of all artifice or surface affect.

Somewhere inside every Viking was also a *hamingja,* the embodiment of a person's luck. A *hamingja* could move independently from its host, and could be perceived by some gifted individuals. There are saga accounts of men retreating from a coming battle because their opponents had too many luck spirits with them, and nobody in their right mind would go against such odds. Curiously, a *hamingja* also had free will, and in extreme situations might even choose to leave its person.

The last part of the fourfold soul was something else entirely, a separate being that somehow dwelled inside every human, both inseparable from them but also distinct. The *fylgja* (literally 'follower') was a female spirit – always female, even for a man – and accompanied a person everywhere throughout life. She was a guardian, a protector, but also a physical link to one's ancestors. When a Viking died, their *fylgja* moved on, continuing down the family line.

Everyone carried with them – through them – the spirit of their kin, watching over them and guiding their steps. How marvellous, and how utterly subversive of tedious male-focused stereotypes, that every single Viking man literally had a spirit-woman inside him.

Vikings believed their bodies contained a 'hugr', which was the essence of what they were, free of artifice

A c800 AD figurine of a Viking woman. Vikings believed that a female spirit dwelled inside every human, and accompanied them throughout life

A Viking brooch or fastener. Viking males were very occasionally buried with what could be deemed female attire

GENDER

3 Crossing the boundaries of sex

There's no getting away from it: Viking society was a patriarchy. Men held sway over politics, they passed laws, they went to war. And – given that a recent study of adult burials in central Sweden found that almost 40 per cent of women were malnourished as children, compared to just 7 per cent of men – it seems they were also given better food.

Until recently, any mention of Viking gender automatically led to discussions of women's lives, as if the world of men was somehow the norm to which everything else was an alternative. We owe our understanding of the Viking Age female experience to this ground-breaking work, but it was also unfairly reduced to a category rather than representing half of humanity.

New research seeks a more inclusive view, sensitive not only to the distinctions between sex and gender but also pushing back against the caricature of masculinity that has come to symbolise the Vikings and their time.

The social pressures laid upon men and women were undoubtedly very real. But the Vikings were also familiar with what would today be called queer identities. These extended across a broad spectrum that went far beyond the binaries of biological sex, and even – as we've seen with the shape-changers – across the frontiers of what we would call human.

While the majority of male and female-bodied individuals certainly presented respectively as men and women, we know that some people signalled their identity differently. For example, we find a very small number of male bodies dressed in what we would otherwise see as feminine attire, with the classic oval brooches and bead necklaces.

There is a saga reference to women who dressed as men, and there were actually legal codes prohibiting people from adopting the clothes or hairstyles of another gender (which surely implies that some were doing just that).

Nor can we rely on conventional assumptions that link activity and gender – in Norway, for example, more men than women were buried with cooking equipment. Meanwhile, the now-famous 'female warrior' of Birka in Sweden is perhaps the most prominent demonstration of how modern stereotypes should not be foisted onto a Viking Age that may have thought and acted very differently.

An engraving of a female skeleton in a 10th-century grave in Birka, Sweden. The burial was with artefacts that have been interpreted as indicating an elite warrior

ALAMY/SWEDISH HISTORY MUSEUM

An 11th/12th-century Scandinavian crucifix. Before the transition to Christianity, most Vikings wouldn't have recognised the concept of religion at all

This foil, showing a couple embracing, may have been used as a sacrificial offering, perhaps imploring the gods for fertility

A coin with Thor's hammer on one side and a cross on the other, representing both pagan and Christian beliefs

4

THE SUPERNATURAL

Bogs, elves and trolls

One of the most significant transformations of the Viking Age was the gradual suppression of the Scandinavians' traditional beliefs and their replacement with Christianity. A key tension between the new book-based faith and what it opposed was that a 'pagan' Viking would not have recognised the concept of 'religion' at all – instead moving through a complex set of customs and rituals that were simply an extension of everyday life.

For everyone, regardless of their status, daily life was a process of negotiation, a bargaining with the beings of the other worlds in order to prosper or simply to be left alone. The leaders of society, and several classes of ritual specialists (the term archaeologists use instead of 'priests'), made offerings to the gods and goddesses at open-air shrines, in the bogs and sacred groves, on platforms of stone, and inside their feasting halls. However, most Vikings' interactions were far more likely to be with the invisible population of elves, dwarves and spirits that made the natural world around them hum with numinous power.

To do this, intermediaries were needed, individuals with particular skills who felt at home in the margins, who knew the seams where the worlds joined. Some 40 specific terms are known for male and female sorcerers, each with their talents and tools. They were engineers of the supernatural who could be enlisted to cajole, coerce or bribe the Vikings' otherworldly neighbours.

Magic, and magicians, also saturate the Icelandic sagas of the Middle Ages, and sorcery is much more of a presence there than the gods. These everyday folk-rituals also lasted longest and, even as late as the 13th century, the Icelandic law codes show that such beliefs had not entirely died out: "If it is discovered that a man or woman has performed sorcery, or raised a great troll to ride people or animals… then they shall be driven out beyond the parish bounds, and forfeit all their property to the king and bishop," decreed one.

In the cults of the gods and the sorcerous performances alike, the most powerful practitioners of these arts were women, and it is clear that a special kind of access to the other worlds lay in the female realm. The goddesses, too, were beings of immense power, including Freyja, Frigg and Idun. Once relegated to the catch-all stereotypes of 'fertility', beings of 'fecundity' and 'plenty', they have emerged in new research as the arbiters of sex, fate, immortality and, not least, war.

Elves, dwarves and spirits made the natural world hum with numinous power

BRIDGEMAN/GETTY IMAGES/BRITISH MUSEUM

A 14th-century fresco shows a Viking ship. Excavations of winter camps suggest that the Norse armies that crossed Europe's seas were made up of thousands of people

BRIDGEMAN

WARFARE

5 Bands of brothers – and sisters

Not so long ago, the great fleets and armies that devastated western Europe in the ninth century tended to be seen as homogeneous groups. The Vikings were a faceless horde of barbarians intent on nothing more than looting and destruction. Thanks to excavations of their winter camps in England and Ireland, isotopic analyses of army mass graves, and new work on metal detector finds, an entirely different picture has emerged in recent years.

Perhaps most importantly, the sheer scale of the camps at Torksey (the Lincolnshire base of the 'Great Heathen Army') and elsewhere confirms the huge size of these Viking forces; they numbered many thousands. This supports the ship counts given in the contemporary written sources, previously thought to be wild exaggerations.

Significantly, it is clear that the camps were occupied not only by men but also by women and children – in other words, by families. The enclosures also supported trade and rudimentary manufacturing, with connections to the surrounding territories and probably a modicum of self-sufficiency. Studies of Scandinavian jewellery types found in the Danelaw (the area of eastern England under Viking control in the ninth century), combined with DNA analyses, suggest that Scandinavian women may have migrated in their thousands.

The basic unit of the Viking armies seems to have been something called *lið* in Old Norse, a kind of war-band attaching to a prominent leader and bound by oaths of loyalty, ranging in size from a shipload to a couple of hundred. The larger Viking forces were conglomerates of these smaller parties, each with their own agendas and objectives, and liable to divide or recombine according to circumstance. At least some of these bands may have been based on kinship. An eighth-century boat burial from the Estonian island of Saaremaa – apparently the aftermath of a Swedish raid – contained 41 dead warriors, four of whom were brothers. Raiding was a family business.

The sheer scale of the camps at Torksey and elsewhere confirms the huge size of these Viking forces

The great Viking 'armies' were effectively mobile, militarised, migratory communities made up not only of warriors but also of non-combatants and settlers.

In following the Viking mind onto the decks of their ships and across the seas, the all-encompassing nature of their world-view becomes apparent. 'Viking', it seems, was a lifestyle, a mindset, a ritual calling and, above all, a choice. H

Neil Price is distinguished professor of archaeology at Uppsala University in Sweden. His book *The Children of Ash and Elm: A History of the Vikings* was published by Allen Lane in August. You can listen to him discuss the Vikings on our podcast soon: *historyextra.com/podcast*

LISTEN Misha Glenny explores the **history of Scandinavia** in a new strand of his BBC Radio 4 **The Invention of...** series this month.
Turn to page 86 for more details

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Q&A

A selection of historical **conundrums** answered by experts

When did people first have tattoos?

We cannot know for certain precisely how old tattooing is as a practice, though the paleoanthropological evidence suggests that it likely emerged around 45,000 years ago, when other symbolic creative behaviours became consistent in humans.

The oldest direct evidence of tattooing we have comes in the form of the preserved body of a Copper Age man named Ötzi, who died around 5,400 years ago in the Austro-Italian Alps. Ötzi's body is marked with a total of 61 short discrete lines which are tattooed at 15 locations on his body, in the form of tally marks and crosses.

In the collection of the British Museum, there are several mummies from pre-dynastic Egypt, both male and female, who bear tattoos of animals and symbols on their dried skins. These are roughly equivalent in age to Ötzi, and ongoing study is, I suspect, likely to confirm that at least some of them are slightly older than him.

In western Europe, there is no evidence of tattooing north of Ötzi's grave site until the Iron Age about 2,000 years later, though further south, indirect material evidence has been found in the form of tools and figurines which suggest the possibility of tattooing back in the Neolithic period, some 10,000 years ago.

In the early 20th century, anthropologists considered tattooing such an unusual and unintuitive practice that they thought it must have been invented in one place at one time and then spread through cultural contact. While some tattoo traditions were shared in this way, particularly between north Africa and southern Europe, current scholarship suggests quite the contrary. The methods to produce a tattoo are technologically very straightforward, and it is more likely that tattooing in cultures as geographically diverse as the Arctic and the South Pacific emerged separately.

Matt Lodder, senior lecturer in art history and theory at the University of Essex

ILLUSTRATION BY **GLEN MCBETH**

Was Thomas Castro really a long lost aristocrat, or a butcher's son from Wapping?

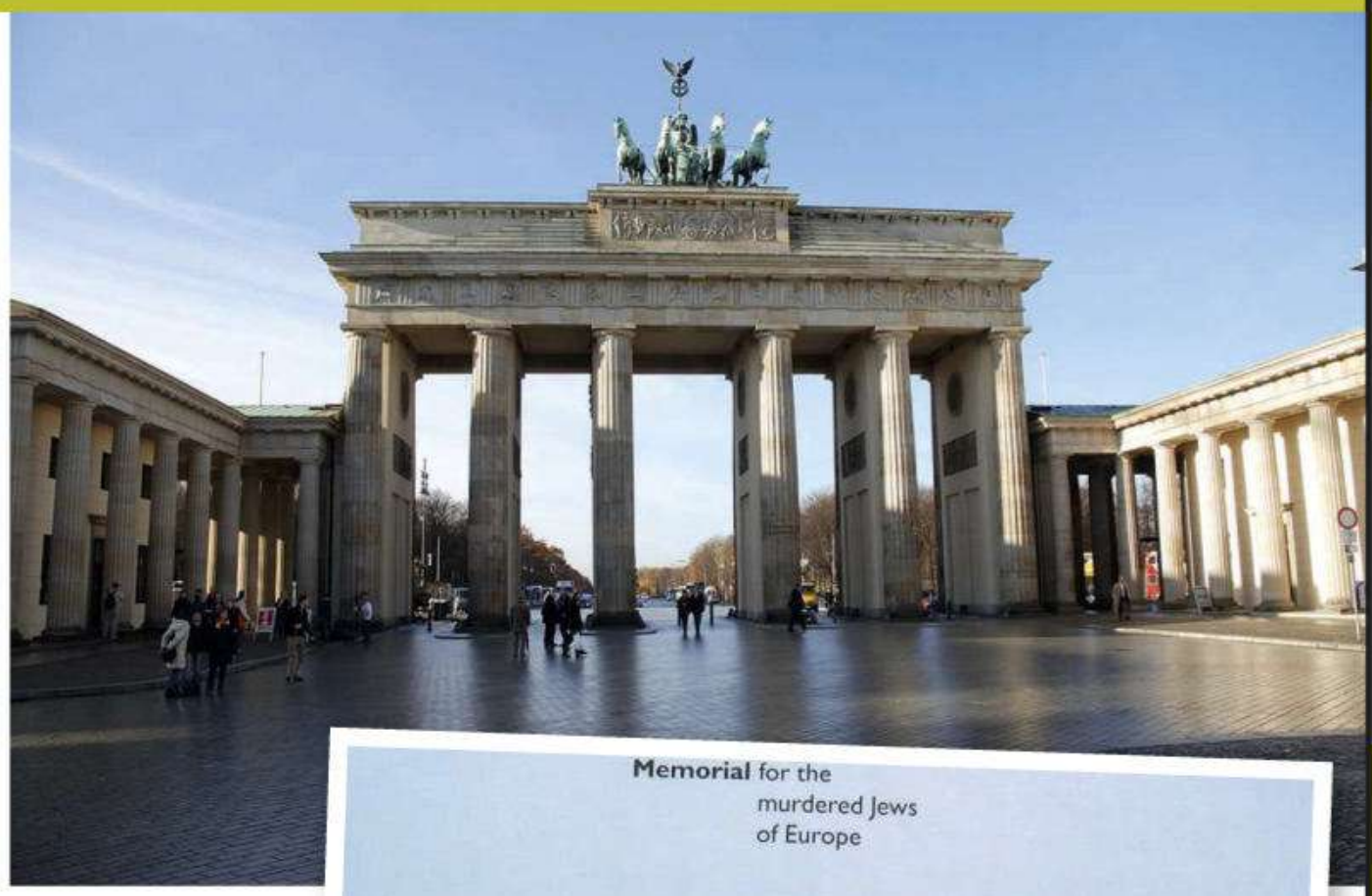
Who was the 'Tichborne Claimant'?

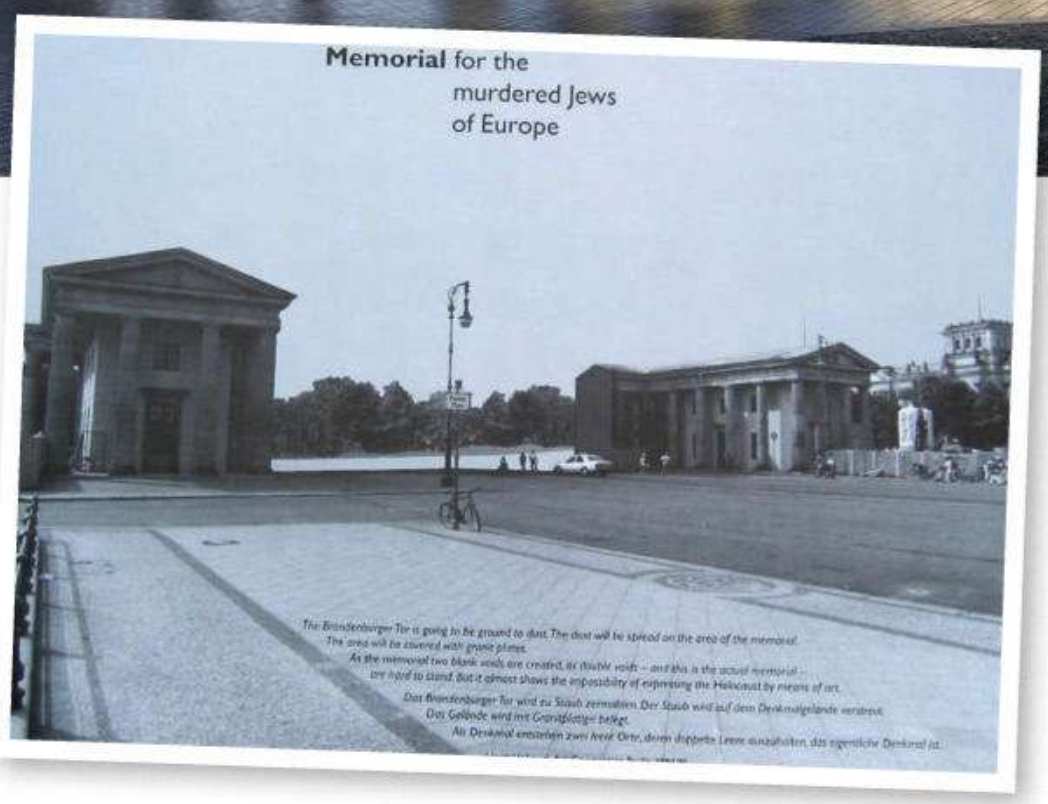
The cause celebre known as the 'Tichborne case' began in 1854, when Roger Charles Tichborne, heir to the Tichborne baronetcy and considerable landholdings, disappeared in a shipwreck. In 1866 the plot thickened when a butcher by the name of Thomas Castro from Wagga Wagga in Australia came forward, claiming to be the lost heir. Tichborne's mother believed him. The rest of the family did not.

Castro went to court to establish his right to his title and estate, but it emerged that his real identity might in fact be Arthur Orton, from Wapping. When his civil case failed, Orton was convicted of perjury and served 10 years, maintaining throughout that he was Tichborne. The story held Victorian Britain transfixed, and it continues to fascinate because there are just enough tantalising little details to sow the seeds of doubt. Several people who had known Tichborne, including the family doctor, believed Orton was the real deal, and he could recall seemingly trivial details of Tichborne's past. Pitted against this was the disbelief of others who had also known him, as he had an often coarse manner at odds with his aristocratic background.

Eugene Byrne, author and journalist specialising in history

GETTY IMAGES





Horst Hoheisel's 1995 proposal for a Holocaust monument (right) advocated grinding the Brandenburg Gate (above) to dust to convey "the impossibility of expressing the Holocaust by means of art"

DREAMSTIME/HORST HOHEISEL/ALAMY

Which artwork in history has caused the greatest outrage?

It's hard to pick one single most outrageous artwork, because it feels like there's always a new one. The nature of art is that it's a personal experience, for the artist and the audience, and everyone has their own opinion. Most generations will dislike the work of the one after them, and those taste wars have been running forever – there's always the shock of the new, a change in style that upsets the old guard.

Personally, my favourite controversial artwork is one that was never made. In 1995 the artist Horst Hoheisel entered the competition to design the Memorial for the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin with a bold proposal. Hoheisel suggested destroying the Brandenburg Gate, grinding it to dust, and covering the site with plain dark granite slabs. The gate is a significant emblem in German history. Dating from the 1790s, it was used as a symbol of power by the Prussian royal family, Napoleon and the Nazis, later representing hope of unification during the Cold War. Hoheisel's proposal asked people to imagine losing that emblem – sacrificing this landmark to make a memorial to the devastation of the Holocaust. Instead of a grand monument, there would be an absence, a space to be filled with remembrance.

Hoheisel (unsurprisingly) didn't win, and the gate still stands. His proposal feels particularly relevant right now, though, with controversial monuments often making the news. How do you memorialise something so awful? What are we willing to sacrifice, in order to remember?

Alice Procter, art historian behind Uncomfortable Art Tours and author of *The Whole Picture* (Cassell, 2020)

DID YOU KNOW...?

Fatal facial hair

A bürgermeister in 16th-century Austria died after **tripping over his own beard and breaking his neck**. Hans Staininger's beard was approximately 2 metres long, and he usually kept it rolled up in a leather pouch. In 1567, a fire broke out at the town hall in Braunau am Inn. While attempting to escape the flames, Staininger suffered his fatal fall. His beard was preserved by his family and can still be seen in Braunau's local history museum.

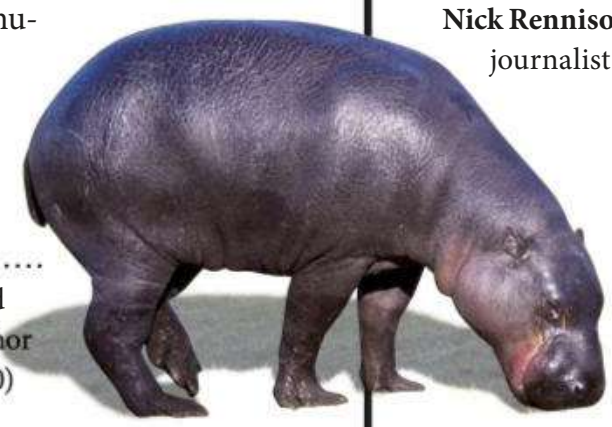
Light-fingered leader

King Farouk of Egypt was an accomplished pickpocket who filched Winston Churchill's watch during a wartime meeting. The king later returned the pocket watch, a family heirloom that had belonged to the first Duke of Marlborough, claiming the theft had only been a practical joke. In truth, Farouk was a kleptomaniac who once pardoned a criminal after the man agreed to teach him the finer points of pickpocketing, and he regularly pilfered other people's possessions.

Peculiar pet

An American president once kept a pygmy hippopotamus as a pet. Calvin Coolidge, president from 1923–29, was a great animal lover and owned a large menagerie of creatures, from dogs and cats to raccoons and a bobcat. In 1927, **he was given a pygmy hippo named Billy** by the business tycoon Harvey Firestone. Billy's career as a presidential pet was brief, however. Coolidge swiftly donated him to the National Zoo, where the hippo lived for the next 28 years. H

Nick Rennison, writer and journalist specialising in history



President Calvin Coolidge was given a pygmy hippo – known as Billy – as a gift

Head over heels
The effigy of Eleanor of Castile on her tomb in Westminster Abbey. Eleanor's marriage to Edward I was a true love match, and the king was heartbroken when she died

“Dearest love”, “splendid animal” or “Jezebel”?

Being a queen of England in the 12th and 13th centuries was a tough assignment, requiring consorts to be fertile, modest, just and faithful (when their husbands were often anything but). **Alison Weir** considers how five queens measured up to expectations

GETTY IMAGES/DREAMSTIME

There's no getting away from it: medieval queen-consorts had a fiendishly demanding role. They were expected to emulate the biblical Queen Esther, who was humble, self-effacing, passive, obedient and modest, yet gifted with inner strength. They were also required to be faithful, wise, just and compassionate. Above all, they were exhorted to mirror the virtues of the Virgin Mary and appear gracious, charitable and merciful. A queen who failed to meet these expectations might be branded a 'Jezebel', likening her to the most notorious queen in the Bible.

As the king's bed was a symbol of majesty, so the queen's was the basis of the influence she could exercise in private. Her bedchamber was not just her private domain, but also the seat of her power, the place where she had sex with the king and where heirs to the throne were born. It was because the queen was entrusted with reproducing the royal bloodline that she had to be above reproach sexually. Adultery was a particularly serious offence, since it jeopardised the succession.

Of course, not every woman met the onerous demands required of medieval queens. Eleanor of Aquitaine (1124–1204) was beautiful and tempestuous, one of the towering female figures of the Middle Ages. Yet, by extension, that meant she was about as far away from the passive, dutiful wallflower of the queenly ideal as you could possibly get.

At the age of 13, Eleanor was married to Louis VII of France. But she later complained that she had wed a monk, not a king. According to the 12th-century philosopher John of Salisbury, Louis loved Eleanor "almost beyond reason", but his conjugal visits were infrequent and resulted in the birth of just two daughters in 15 years.

It was because the queen was entrusted with reproducing the royal bloodline that she had to be above reproach

In 1147, Eleanor accompanied Louis on the Second Crusade, which was, for many reasons, a failure. What happened in Antioch would change the course of Eleanor's life and make her one of the most controversial figures in western Europe – chiefly due to the attentions paid to her by her uncle Raymond, Prince of Antioch. As John of Salisbury put it, Raymond's "constant, indeed almost continuous conversation with her aroused the king's suspicions".

Raymond and Eleanor may have been attracted to one another, but his primary ambition was to grow his territory. And when Louis refused to help Raymond expand Antioch, a furious Raymond resolved to deprive the king of his wife. According to the chronicler William of Tyre, Eleanor "readily assented, for she was a foolish woman. Contrary to the king's dignity, she mocked the laws of marriage and did not respect the marriage bed." It is not known how far matters actually went but the scandal wrought terrible damage to the queen's reputation.

The troubadour Cercamon made a veiled reference to Eleanor when he deplored the conduct of a woman who lay with more than one man. "Better for her never to have been born than to have committed the fault that will be talked about from here to Poitou," he sniped.

It was in Paris, in 1151, that the future Henry II of England first cast lustful eyes on Eleanor, who, at 27, was nine years his senior. As the writer and clergyman Walter Map later noted, she "cast her unchaste eyes" at him. But it was "secretly reputed that she had shared Louis' bed with Geoffrey", Count of Anjou, Henry's father.

Walter Map wasn't the only chronicler to claim that Eleanor had had sexual relations with the count. Giraldus Cambrensis asserted that Henry's father "had carnally known Queen Eleanor. The count later confessed this to his son, forbidding him in any wise to touch her, because he had known her himself."

But when weighing up the veracity or otherwise of such claims, it has to be remembered that Giraldus was hostile to Henry II and disapproved of Eleanor, so he may have been tempted to exaggeration or invention. (And if Eleanor *had* committed adultery with Geoffrey, would it not have been enough to secure Henry an annulment of his marriage with Eleanor, when he sought it in the 1170s? The fact that the annulment was not granted is surely significant.)

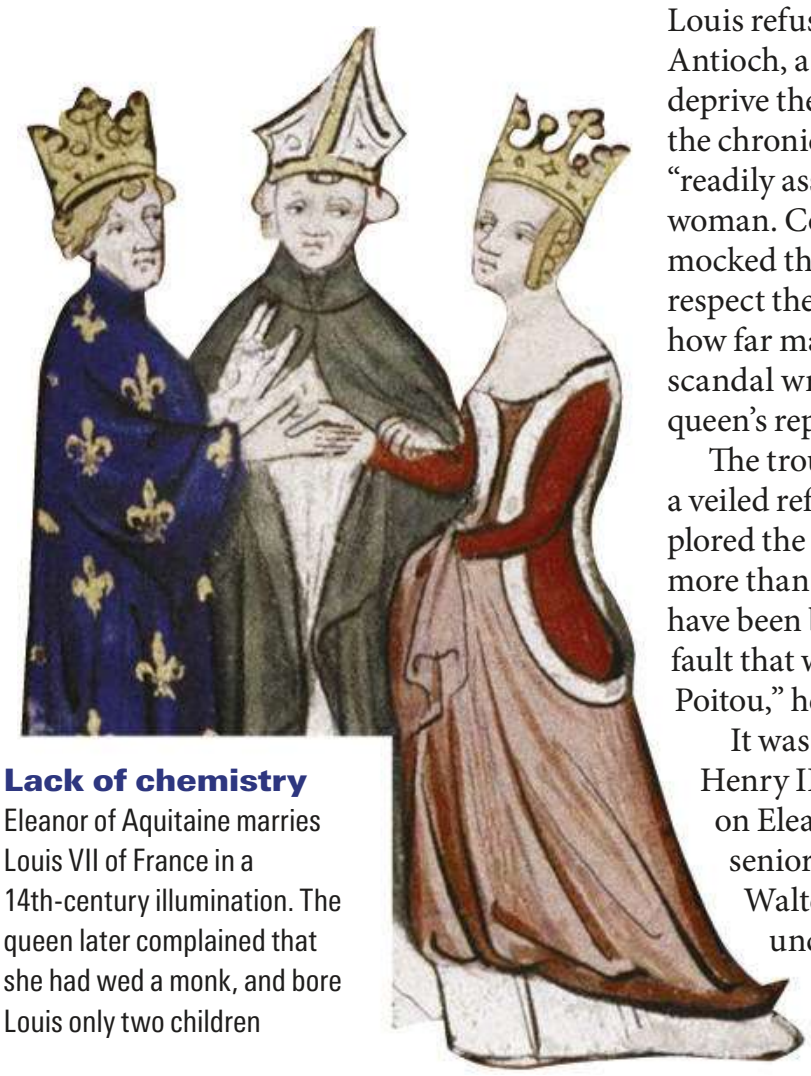
Blithely, Henry "presumed to sleep adulterously with the Queen of France". But lust was only a part of the attraction fizzing between them. He was, writes Gervase of Canterbury "tempted by the quality of this woman's blood, but even more by her lands", for the acquisition of such a bride would make him the greatest prince in Europe. After Eleanor had obtained an annulment of her marriage to Louis, Henry married her. Like most aristocratic marriages of the period, it was primarily a business arrangement, with both partners committed to safeguarding their interests.

Eleanor now had no cause to complain of a lack of attention from her new husband. For the first 15 years of their marriage, Henry was a regular visitor to her bed – the births of eight children are evidence of that. Almost from the first, though, he was "an adulterer in secret". He took his sexual pleasure wherever he found it, with noble ladies and, according to Walter Map, the "creatures of the night", who regularly infiltrated his court. In fact, he was unfaithful to Eleanor almost immediately, fathering an illegitimate son just weeks after their marriage.

After 16 years, the couple separated. Then, in 1173, Eleanor violated every queenly ideal by supporting her sons in a rebellion against their father, for which she was imprisoned or kept under supervision until 1189. In fact, she only won her freedom when the ageing king died.

Infatuated king?

Henry II was succeeded to the throne by his eldest surviving son, the crusader-king Richard I. And, within two years, Richard had a wife and England a new queen, one who has long lived in the shadow of her famously formidable mother-in-law. Her name was Berengaria of Navarre.



Lack of chemistry
Eleanor of Aquitaine marries Louis VII of France in a 14th-century illumination. The queen later complained that she had wed a monk, and bore Louis only two children

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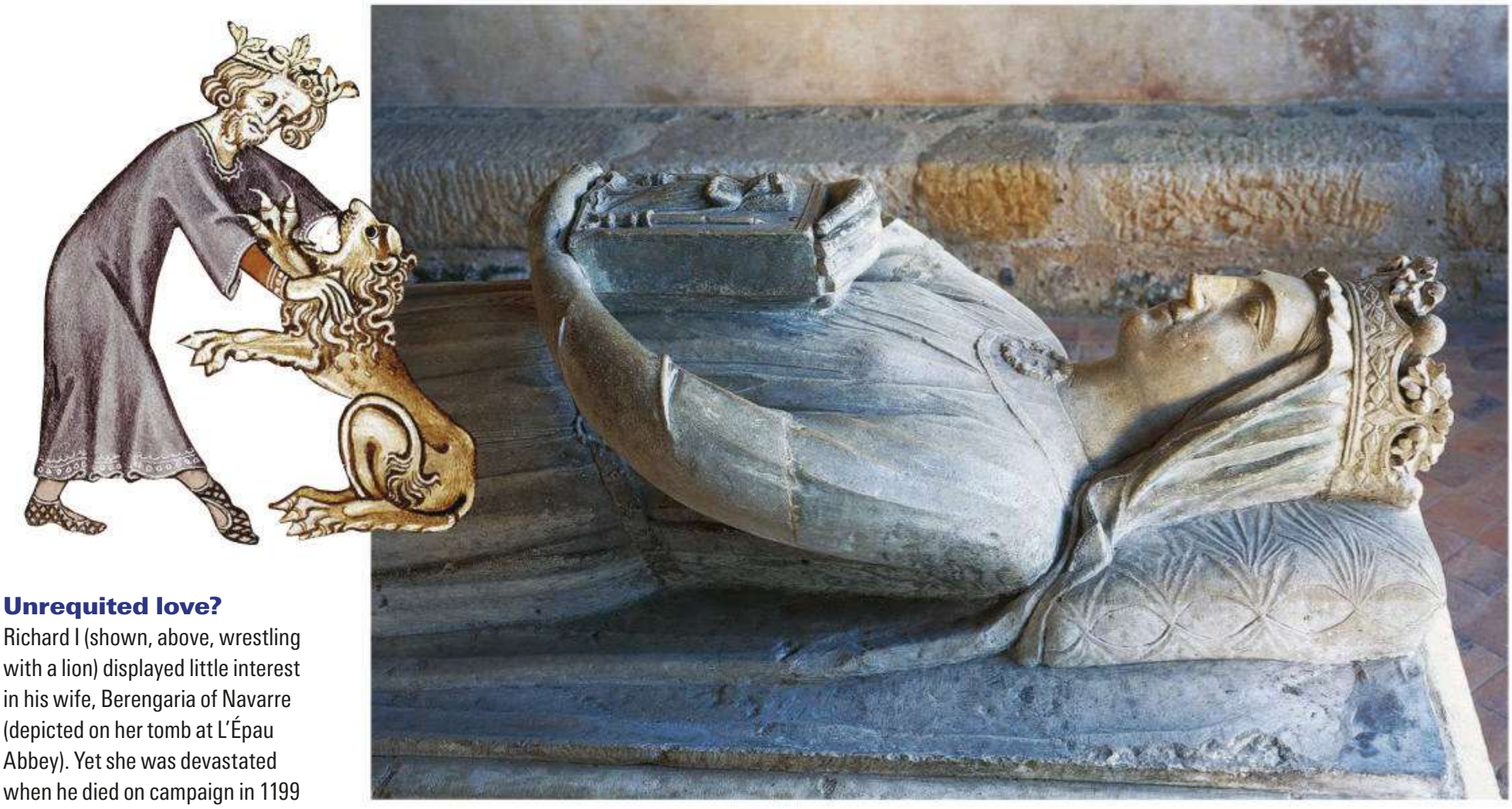

Unrequited love?
Richard I (shown, above, wrestling with a lion) displayed little interest in his wife, Berengaria of Navarre (depicted on her tomb at L'Épau Abbey). Yet she was devastated when he died on campaign in 1199

ALAMY/AKG-IMAGES

According to the 13th-century *Gesta Regis Ricardi*, Richard "had desired her for a very long time" before they married in Cyprus in 1191, when Berengaria was about 26 and Richard was on his way to join the Third Crusade. Observers reported that the king was infatuated by his new wife, but the consummation of the marriage was probably deferred until they reached the Holy Land, for the crusaders had vowed that they would abstain from sex until they arrived there. After a year spent trailing Richard as he tried – and failed – to take Jerusalem, Berengaria returned ahead of him to France, where she learned, to her distress, that he had been captured on his way home.

Berengaria apparently received no word from Richard while he was in captivity, although he wrote often to his mother, Queen Eleanor. It was obvious which of the two queens held his heart and his trust. Richard made no attempt to see Berengaria after his liberation, and it became common knowledge that he had long neglected her.

As king, it was his duty to sire an heir, but it is recorded that he did not expect to have children with Berengaria. Richard's later actions show that he regarded himself as the guilty party in their estrangement.

In 1190, Richard had publicly confessed "the foulness of his sins against nature". According to Roger of Howden, five years later, a hermit admonished him: "Remember the destruction of Sodom; refrain from what is forbidden." Since the 18th century, when it was first hinted that he was homosexual, scholars have wondered about the nature of the king's sins – and, by the 12th century, 'sodomy' had become almost synonymous with homosexuality.

Does this explain Richard's abandonment of Berengaria? That's far from certain. The king was notorious for forcibly abducting "the wives, daughters and kinswomen of his freemen" (in the words of Giraldus Cambrensis), raping them, then passing them on to his knights "for whoring", and he had at least one illegitimate child. His sexuality is therefore unclear.

After being censured by the hermit, Richard did penance and, according to Roger of Howden, "received his wife, whom he had not known for a long time, and, renouncing unlawful intercourse, was united with [her] and the two became one flesh".

We know that Richard and Berengaria were living together at Poitiers later that year, yet there are few mentions of their being together thereafter. They never had any children. Given that, and the breakdown of the alliance with Navarre, Berengaria was no longer of any use to Richard and there is no further record of the couple being in each other's company. Yet she was in deep sorrow when Richard succumbed to a wound sustained while on campaign in 1199. She would never remarry.

A headlong rush

By the time Richard died, his brother and successor, King John, had been married to Isabella of Gloucester for 10 years. But shortly after ascending the throne, John obtained an annulment on the grounds of consanguinity, and in 1200 he decided to marry another Isabella – the young heiress of Angoulême.

John had snatched Isabella of Angoulême from her betrothed, Hugh IX de Lusignan; some chroniclers assert that she was abducted screaming in terror. The 33-year-old prince took one look at his beautiful bride – who would be called the Helen of her age – and was "madly enamoured". Contemporary chroniclers deplored his headlong rush into a marriage based, as they believed, on lust. Yet it had been a purely political arrangement.

When they married, Isabella was probably under 12 years old, the age at which the church permitted a bride to cohabit with her husband. Nevertheless, the king found "all kinds of delights in his queen", who, wrote Roger of Wendover, was "a splendid animal rather than a stateswoman".

The couple may have stopped short of intercourse. It was known that a girl in her early teens was more at risk of dying in childbirth, bearing a premature child or suffering complications in labour; her chances of giving birth to a healthy infant were also diminished. An early death in childbirth could jeopardise a valuable political alliance, so princes often put pragmatic considerations before physical ones.

It was said that John was so besotted with Isabella that he lost the duchy of Normandy under the quilts of the marriage bed. In fact, he had faced the near-impossible task of holding

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Dreamboat A 1250s drawing of Henry III and Alienor of Provence returning from Gascony by sea. The king relied heavily on his wife and, in letters, regularly referred to her as his "dearest love"

In loving memory
The Eleanor Cross in Geddington, Northamptonshire, one of 12 such monuments that Edward I had erected to commemorate his wife, Eleanor of Castile

together an unwieldy empire in the face of unprecedented French aggression. His failure to engage with the French was the chief cause of his woes, though his lust for Isabella may have contributed.

A few years later, an unreliable contemporary claimed that Isabella had "often been found guilty of incest, sorcery and adultery, so that the king, her husband, has ordered those of her lovers who have been apprehended, to be strangled with a rope in her own bed". But there is no evidence to support this, or modern theories that John kept Isabella a prisoner. It would have been hard to conceal an illicit pregnancy in a teeming royal household, still less the hanging of adulterous lovers. Isabella's supposed immorality therefore rests on one isolated, unsubstantiated report from a dubious source.

Love and power

In contrast to Eleanor, Berengaria and Isabella, England's next two queens were fortunate in that their arranged marriages turned into love matches. Henry III and Alienor of Provence (c1223–91) were married for 36 years and devoted to one another. Alienor, wrote the chronicler Matthew Paris, was "very fair to behold", and Henry was instantly smitten with her. He was an uxorious husband, a family man in every sense; and Alienor, who had a strong sense of family loyalty, proved a loving and fiercely supportive wife through all the trials of his reign.

Henry adored Alienor. Even in the dry language of the official records, she is frequently referred to as his "dearest love" or "beloved love". She exercised considerable influence over him, while he relied heavily on her advice. Because of this, she was able to wield more power than any queen-consort since Eleanor of Aquitaine.

Chroniclers attacked Henry III for being "under the influence of his wife" – and letting her get away with it

As Matthew Paris put it: "The king thought he could never do enough to justify his love for the queen and her family." He showered her many relations with generous grants of lands, money, wardships, offices, titles, bishoprics and privileges, and encouraged the outraged English nobility to intermarry with them. Matthew Paris blamed Alienor for spurring the king to favour them, and Henry for "being under the influence of his wife" – and letting her get away with it. This was the common view, and Alienor's popularity suffered accordingly.

Henry III and Alienor's love match may have had its detractors but that didn't stop their son Edward I following its template. Raised in the happy family atmosphere his parents had created, Edward came to adore his wife, Eleanor of Castile (1241–90). She was his constant companion and "inexpressibly dear to him". The love and supportiveness between them would become much talked of by their contemporaries.

Eleanor's love for her husband always came first, even exceeding her affection for the numerous children she bore him. She accompanied Edward everywhere he went. While on crusade together, she is said to have had one of her clerks transcribe for him Flavius Vegetius Renatus's *De re militari* (*Concerning Military Matters*). The tale that she sucked poison from a stab wound he was dealt by an assassin is often dismissed as spurious, yet there may be some truth in it.

Their marriage also lasted for 36 years and, when Eleanor died in 1290, Edward was bereft. He wrote: "The impiety of death, which spares no man, has stricken our heart with vehement sorrow and turned the harp of our house into mourning. Our queen of good memory, whom in life we dearly cherished, and whom, in death, we cannot cease to love, has been prayed for constantly."

No English queen was ever honoured with such elaborate obsequies. Edward had three tombs and 12 crosses raised in Eleanor's memory. Her legend became entrenched in the public consciousness and it was she – over and above the four very different women who preceded her – who came to embody the medieval ideal of queenship. H

Alison Weir is Britain's bestselling female historian. Her latest book, *Queens of the Crusades* (part two of her England's Medieval Queens series), was recently published by Jonathan Cape

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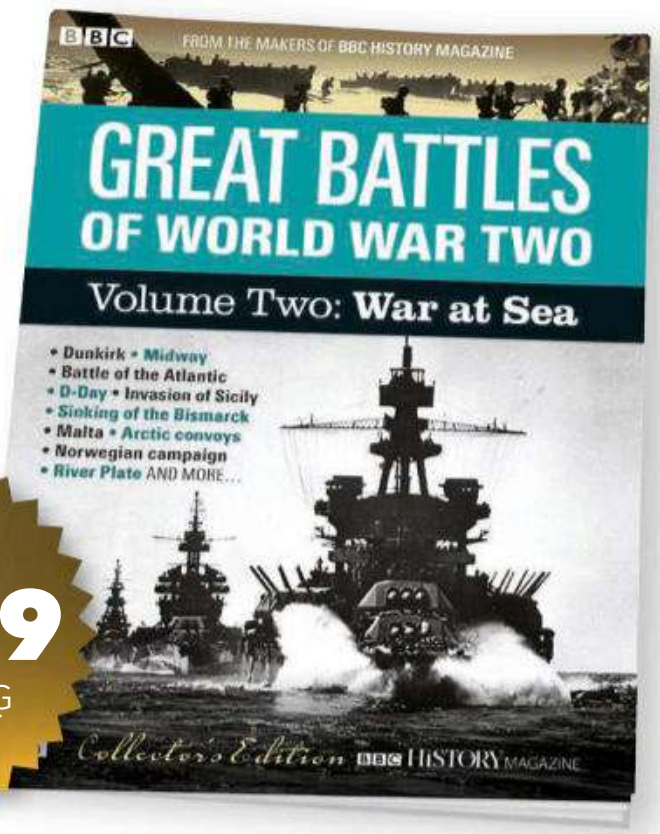
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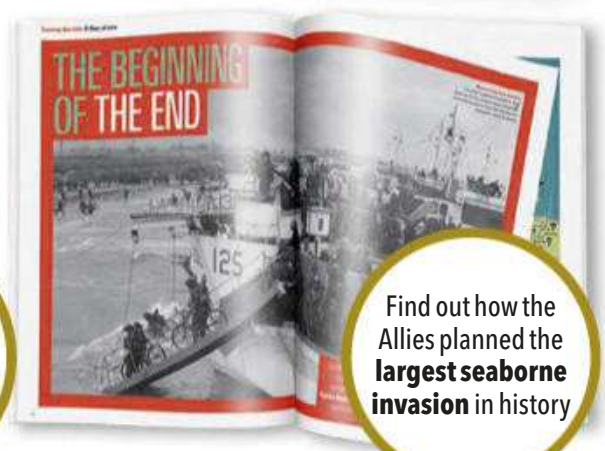

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The best of times …

Complements an episode of **Royal History's Biggest Fibs** on Regency Britain

BBC TWO

The great divide

LEFT: **The Blue Velvet Closet in Carlton House, the Prince Regent's fantastically opulent residence on Pall Mall.** RIGHT: **An ink drawing of a London 'rag fair' where old clothes and textiles were traded, c1800. The early 19th century saw a "greater variance in living standards than probably ever before or since", writes Ian Mortimer**

… the worst of times

Never was the chasm between rich and poor more stark than in the Regency era. **Ian Mortimer** chronicles a period in which the wealthiest gorged themselves on the fruits of Britain's industrial might, while the working classes endured lives that were often nasty, brutish and short

ALAMY

Every historical age sees extraordinary inequalities of wealth. Whether we are talking about ancient Rome or 20th-century Britain, the pattern is commonly described as a pyramid, with a small number of exceedingly rich individuals at the apex and a large number of poor people at the base. As we all know, the differences between the top and the bottom are extreme – to the extent that some of the super-wealthy have incomes more than a thousand times greater than the national average. But what about the variance in their basic standards of living? Aside from the glitz and the glamour, are the lifestyles of the rich and poor always poles apart?

You might assume that the only possible answer to that question is yes. Peasants and slaves never live like lords and kings. But consider it in terms of life expectancy. In the Middle Ages, a lord's sons and daughters could expect to live into their mid-thirties and the peasantry about five years less, so the poor lived around 85 per cent as long as the rich. The modern world is only a little more equal: children growing up today in the most deprived areas of Britain can expect to live between 85 per cent and 90 per cent as long as those in the least-deprived areas. It looks as if that proportion is more or less a constant.

But one period stands out as different: the early 19th century. In the 1830s, middle-class Londoners could expect to live to 44 but working-class ones only 22, just 50 per cent as long. Working-class people in towns like Liverpool, Preston and Manchester were lucky if they reached 19, at a time when average life expectancy from birth in the UK was more than 40. In the unsewered streets of Ashton-under-Lyne, artisans' life expectancy at birth was just 13, less than a third of that of their more prosperous fellow citizens.

Extremes of opulence

Why was the early 19th century so unusual? As you can imagine, there were several reasons. The industrial revolution obviously led to the worsening of the living conditions of the poor. At the same time it had an impact on the wealthy, too, enriching them to an unprecedented degree. The result was a greater variance in living standards than probably ever before or since. As the American ambassador to Great Britain, John Quincy Adams, put it in his diary while in London in 1816: "The extremes of opulence and of want are more remarkable, and more constantly obvious, in this country than in any other I ever saw."

Anyone who has even so much as glanced at a gentleman's country house built before 1830 will be aware that the wealthy were surrounded by uplifting, refined architecture and design, in which comfort was combined with a fabulous sense of style. In the grandest houses of all, such as the Prince Regent's Carlton House on Pall Mall, the internal fittings were a wealth of silk damask and gold. The decorative features were covered in gold leaf, as was the furniture; the huge glass chandeliers were trimmed with gold; golden clocks and ornaments were exhibited on gold-leaf-covered plinths; the paintings were framed in gold. The prince spent vast sums on the place – by 1795 he was £630,000 in debt – and in 1826, as king (George IV), he could afford to have it demolished.

Even an ordinary gentleman with an income of about £2,000 per year from his country estate could afford a London house as well as a country seat stuffed with mahogany furniture designed by the likes of Hepplewhite and Sheraton, and decorated with art by Reynolds, Gainsborough and many more great British artists of the time. By the 1820s most gentlemen's residences had water closets and provisions for washing. Some even had dedicated bathrooms with hot and cold running water.

In marked contrast, the workmen who physically built the houses of the gentry could consider themselves well paid in the 1820s if they received 15 shillings a week. Factory workers and labourers would receive less than this, and servants less still. Hundreds of thousands of men and women lacked regular employment altogether. Their accommodation was truly appalling, especially in the rapidly growing industrial towns. In the parish of St Giles in London, a surveyor visited a slum terrace and found the yard "covered with night soil from the overflowing of the privy, to the depth of nearly six inches, and bricks were placed to enable the inmates to get across dry shod".

Inspectors frequently reported similar conditions in the northern towns. In parts of Liverpool, people were crammed into court houses at a density of more than 1,000 people per acre. Liquid from cesspits and the foetid rubbish strewn across the ground outside oozed through the cellar walls where many were forced to sleep. The communal cesspits in the courts had no doors as the landlords claimed they would have been used for firewood.

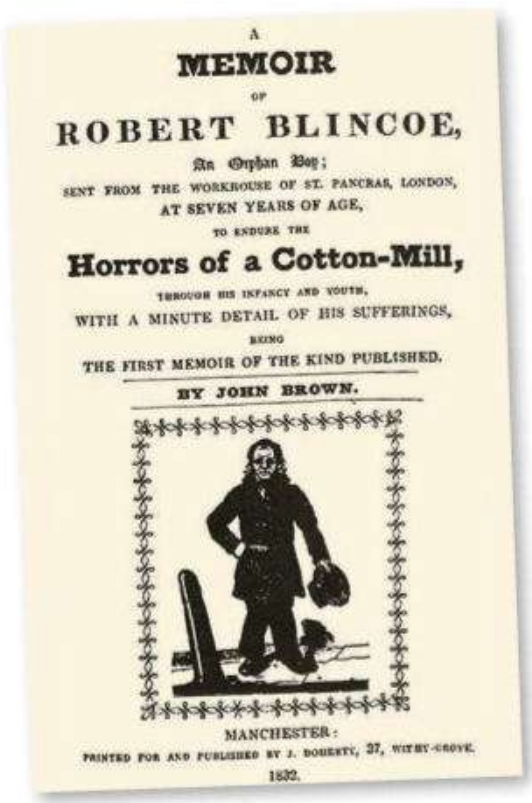
Those without homes had to cram together in boarding houses, often on the floors, or find a place in a communal barn at 2 pence per night, where every imaginable disease spread quickly among the unwashed bodies, including such killers as smallpox, tuberculosis and, from the 1830s, cholera.

Life-threatening labour

While the poorest Britons lived in squalor, the upper classes managed their estates and indulged themselves in their enthusiasms. Most didn't work. Younger sons and those who opted for employment chose a well-paid and dignified patriotic service, such as a commission in the army or navy, an ambassadorial role, parliament or the church. The middle classes similarly selected how they wanted to make a living.

The working classes, who made up more than 70 per cent of the population, had no such choice. Those who were lucky enough to work as agricultural labourers could expect to live for 36 years – approximately twice as long as their cousins in the industrial towns. But agricultural opportunities were on the decline as more machines were employed, more arable land was given over to sheep farming, and more food was imported. For the remainder, the options were to go into service or to work in a factory or mill.

Robert Blincoe's career is illuminating in this respect. He was born in London in 1792, orphaned at the age of four, and placed in a workhouse. From there he was sold at the age of seven to the owner of a mill near Nottingham. For the next 14 years he was required to work without pay for 14 hours a day, six days a week, on the spinning frames, in dusty conditions. His clothing was minimal; he was not given soap to wash nor was he fed properly. He started stealing doughballs from the mill's pigsties but the pigs soon became wise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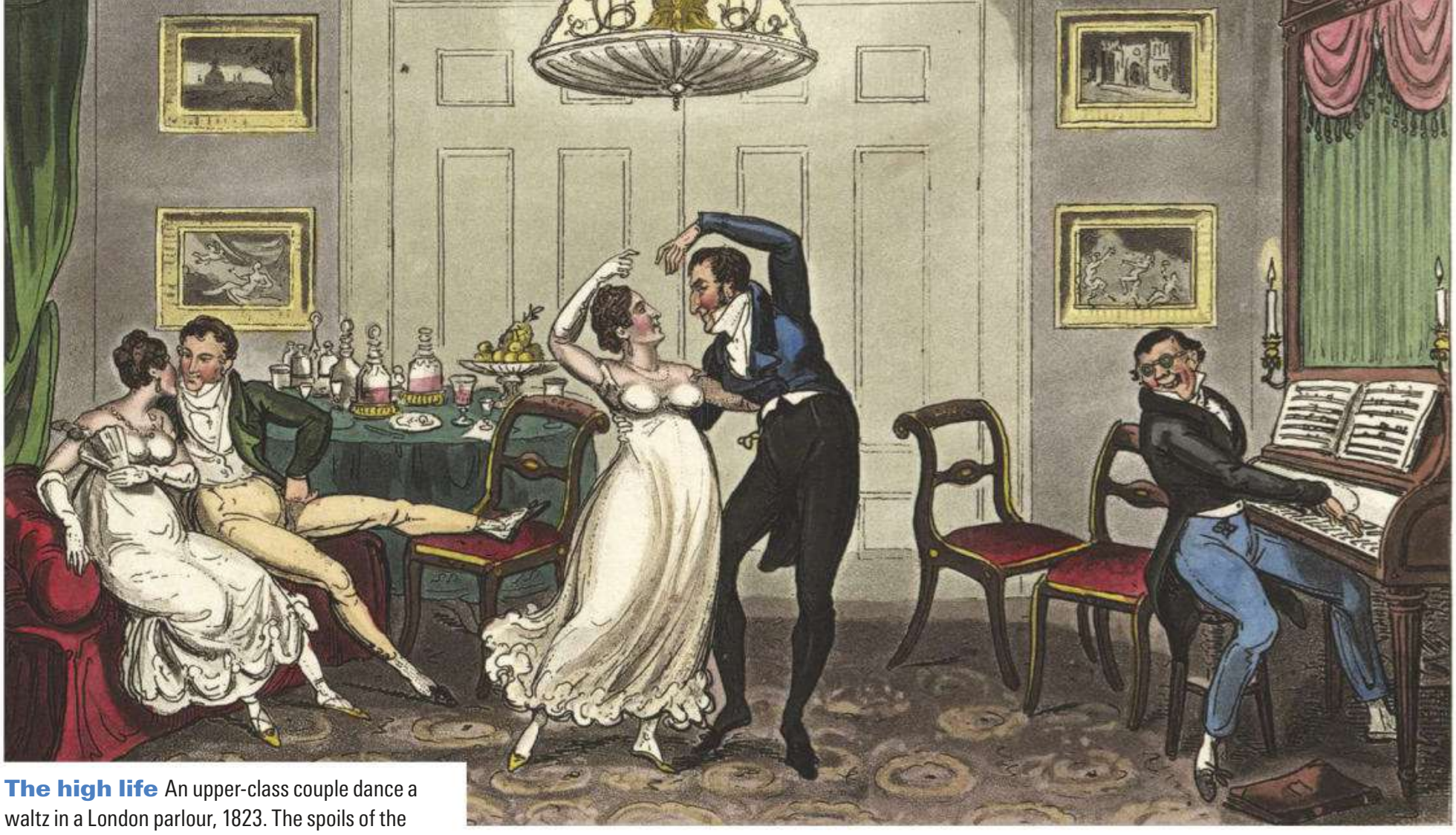
Hard knock life
As a child-labourer in a Nottingham cotton mill, Robert Blincoe worked 14 hours a day, six days a week with little food or clothing – as he told the author of his life story (above)

ALAMY



The high life An upper-class couple dance a waltz in a London parlour, 1823. The spoils of the industrial revolution made those at the top of Britain's social pyramid wealthier than they'd ever been

Plumbing the depths Children work in a mine, as depicted in an illustration from 1840. One observer described such young labourers as "distinguished by an extraordinary wretchedness"

BRIDGEMAN/TOPFOTO

to his pilfering and threw them in the mud when they saw him coming. He suffered from constant diarrhoea, was regularly beaten, and like all his young colleagues, he lost parts of limbs in the unguarded machines. One day he watched in horror as a girl his age was dragged into a spinning machine by her skirts. He heard her bones all snapped by the whirling mechanism and then her blood "thrown around like water twirled from a mop". Later, he tried to run away from the mill but was quickly caught and returned, with a reward being paid to the man who found him.

Those who had such a start in life, with no education and nothing else to offer, were generally doomed to a short existence of hard labour. Blincoe left the mill as soon as he was old enough but many stayed there for their whole lives, and died either from the dust or their injuries.

Huge numbers of men, women, boys and girls worked as labourers in the mines. In 1813 in Cumberland, 630ft underground, the author Richard Ayton raised his lantern to see lines of wagons driven by young girls in the pitch-black tunnels. He described all the people down there as being "distinguished by an extraordinary wretchedness. Immoderate labour and a noxious atmosphere had marked their countenances with the signs of disease and decay; they were mostly half-naked, blackened all over with dirt, and altogether so miserably disfigured and abused that they looked like a race fallen from the common rank of men and doomed, as in a kind of purgatory, to wear away their lives in these dismal shades."

In parts of Ashton-under-Lyne, life expectancy was 13, less than a third of that of more prosperous citizens

Whatever the industrial process, it was likely to contribute to the workers' ill health and premature deaths. Painters and glaze dippers developed lead poisoning. Tailors developed chronic heart and stomach problems. Chimney-cleaning boys developed scrotal cancer. Arguably the worst working conditions of all were those to be found in the grinding industries, especially in Sheffield. The work was carried out in poorly ventilated cellars and generated a lot of dust. Most fork-grinders in Sheffield were dead by the age of 28. Ninety per cent did not make it to 40.

For the rich, the Regency period was one of haute cuisine and epicurean variety. As the poet Robert Southey wrote in 1807: "All parts

Have and have-not

A man gives a coin to a crossing-sweeper, c1830. "The extremes of opulence and of want are more remarkable… in this country than in any other I ever saw," observed the American ambassador to Britain

of the world are ransacked for an Englishman's table. Turtle are brought alive from the West Indies… India supplies sauces and curry powder… hams [are imported] from Portugal and Westphalia; reindeers' tongues from Lapland; caviar from Russia; sausages from Bologna; macaroni from Naples; oil from Florence; olives from France, Italy or Spain; cheese from Parma and Switzerland."

Over-indulgence was common. Several 'ordinaries' or standard menus in the finest London hotels at this time cost 3 guineas (£3 3s) per head, with an extra guinea for a bottle of fine wine. The earliest restaurants in London were established at this time; there was even an Indian curry house in the 1810s catering to returning nabobs.

Tea-stained water

The poorest sectors of society found themselves eating as their medieval ancestors had done, with very little protein in their diet. Many examples were quoted by the Revd David Davies in his examination of the living standards of agricultural labourers in the 1790s. A typical case was that of a Berkshire couple and their five children, who bought 7½ gallons of flour each week for their daily bread, plus 1lb of bacon. They also purchased a little tea, salt, sugar and butter. And that was it. No fish, no cheese and no vegetables other than what they grew for themselves. No beer, even. Of their total income of 8s 6d per week, 8s 3d went on food. Most meals were simply bread and butter. So when the price of flour in Berkshire *trebled*, as it did in 1800, their lives became wretched.

Couples would enrol a baby in a burial club and then, when the child fell sick, let it die so they could claim on the insurance

As for tea, people talked about it being a great leveller, but there was a world of difference between the fine teas drunk by the wealthy and the water stained with a few re-used tea leaves consumed by the poor.

An agricultural labourer's family could at least use the garden that probably went with their cottage. It was precisely for this reason that the growing of potatoes spread across the whole of the British Isles over the course of the 18th century. In short, gardens saved lives. Those living in the over-populated urban slums had no such opportunities to grow their own. For them, it was not so much a matter of having a balanced diet as obtaining *anything* to eat.

Among the lower classes, the difficulties faced by mothers and newborn babies were particularly challenging. For a start, the mothers were malnourished. The children of those transported to Australia grew about 2 inches taller than their parents, due to food shortages having stunted their parents' growth in England.

When it came to the birth, well-heeled families could afford their own accoucheurs, midwives and doctors, equipped with forceps and good medical knowledge. Some private doctors saw maternal mortality rates of just 0.2 per cent over the course of their careers.

The poor had only limited access to professional medical help and hence their women and babies died more frequently in childbirth. If both survived, the malnourishment of the mother was then passed on to the child. Hence one of the key reasons why life expectancy was so low: many more working-class babies did not live. In Liverpool, 53 per cent of babies died before they were five; in Preston, 57 per cent did. These figures are almost exactly the same as those of slaves in the West Indies.

These infant deaths must have sapped many mothers' will to live. But the position was so dire that some deaths were welcomed, on account of there being fewer mouths to

MARY EVANS

Rich pickings
A bourgeois family eats dinner in an engraving from 1825. Everything from Russian caviar to Italian olives was on the menu for wealthy diners

feed. In the 18th century, the philanthropist Jonas Hanway estimated that an infant under the age of four had a life expectancy of just one month after entering a London workhouse. As he put it: "Parish officers never intend that parish infants should live".

Even more shocking was the desperate strategy of families living off the deaths of their own children. Hard-pressed couples would enrol a baby in one or more burial clubs and then, when the child fell sick, they would let him or her die so they could claim on the insurance. This is why rent collectors were sometimes asked to wait a few days until a child had died.

On one occasion, a wealthy Lancashire gentlewoman heard that her wet nurse's child was ill, so she kindly offered to send her own physician to help. But the mother replied: "Oh, never mind, Ma'am, it's in two burial clubs." A government inspector reported that "It is not an unfrequent circumstance to find a child enrolled in three or more burial clubs, so that the parents may receive at its death from £16 to £20. That, in certain instances, this has been productive of infanticide is proved beyond all doubt by the well-known trials for infanticide at Bolton and Stockport." And, he adds, "an analysis of returns from Preston, where, in three societies alone there are upwards of 23,000 members, has distinctly shown that there is a greater rate of mortality among children entered in burial clubs than in those not belonging to them".

Shockingly, babies under the age of six months whose parents entered them in a burial club were 35 per cent more likely to die than those who were not in such a club.

Infant mortality
A woman breastfeeds her child, c1830. In industrial towns like Liverpool, more than half of all infants died before they were five, often due to malnourishment passed down from their mothers

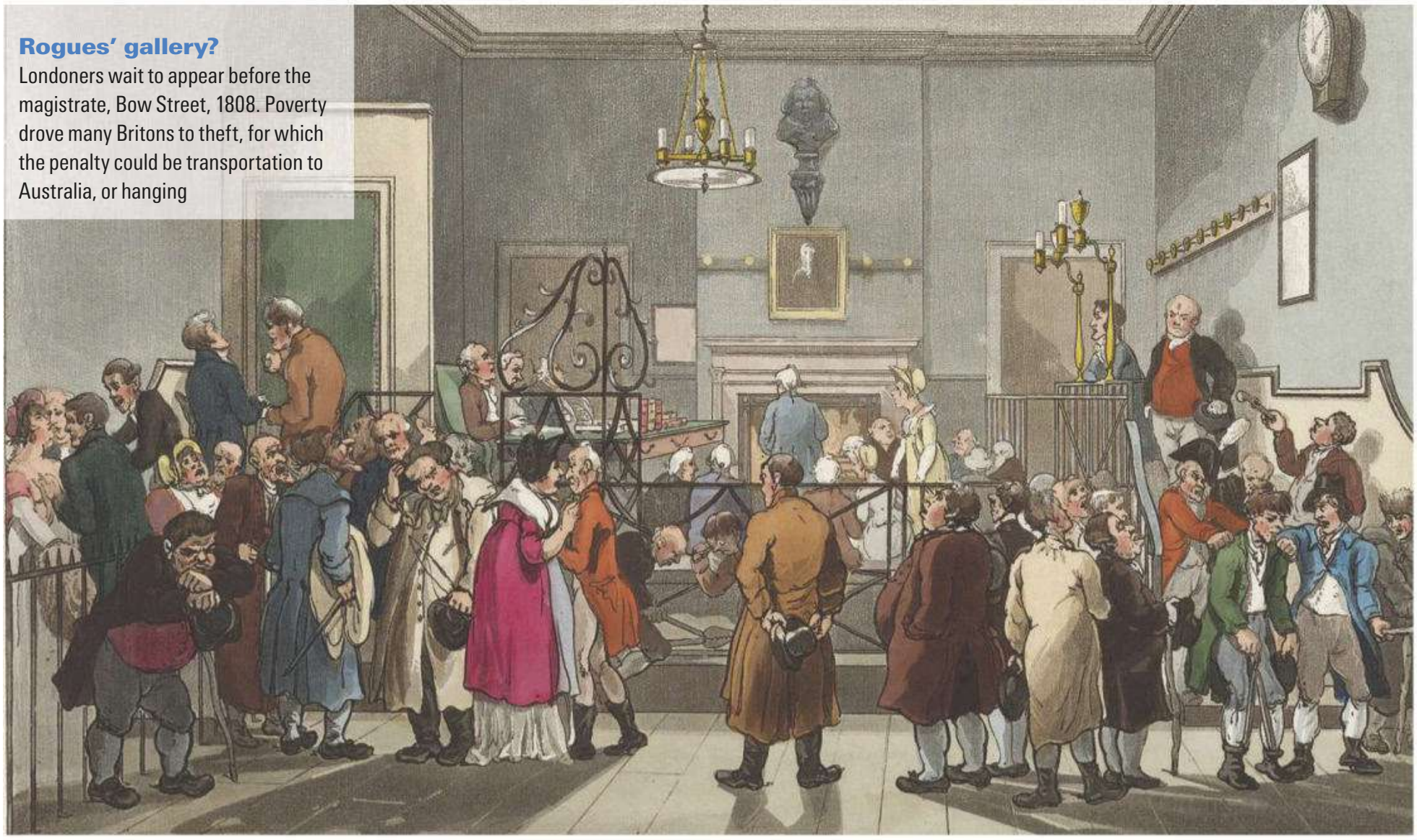
AKG-IMAGES/GETTY IMAGES

Turning to prostitution

Extreme poverty was, almost inevitably, accompanied by high levels of crime. If a couple with a family were denied poor relief and did not wish to go into a workhouse, they had no choice but to resort to more desperate measures. Huge numbers of women turned to prostitution: it was estimated at the time that one in five women in London lived off immoral earnings.

Large numbers of men and women took to crime. More than 90 per cent of all cases in the county courts in the early 19th century were for theft. (For comparison, in the modern world, less than a quarter of arrests involve stolen property.) Until 1823, the Bloody Code was still in force, meaning that the penalty was death for more than 200 crimes, including stealing goods worth more than 12d. If the principal breadwinner was hanged or transported to Australia, then a family was left in a worse position than before.

Another strategy was to obtain food on credit. However, most shopkeepers only advanced credit facilities to those they believed could pay. Moreover, if a poor family



Rogues' gallery?
Londoners wait to appear before the magistrate, Bow Street, 1808. Poverty drove many Britons to theft, for which the penalty could be transportation to Australia, or hanging

failed to pay, then the father could be sent to prison at the shopkeeper's request for non-payment of his bills. This meant extra costs (gaolers' fees) and prevented him from earning while inside. Some people spent decades in prison for failing to repay a few pounds; many died behind bars. Again, the family was even worse off as a result.

Given these circumstances, it is easy to see why there was so much discontent, especially in the industrial north of England. Fashionable ladies in London could spend £4 on a single tall feather to wear in their hair at a ball – a sum that would have fed a labourer's family for 10 weeks.

From rags to riches

It really was both the best and the worst of times (to paraphrase Dickens), depending on how much money you had. Yet this age offered men and women more opportunities than perhaps ever before to start life at one end of the social spectrum and end it at the other. James Morrison was the orphaned son of an innkeeper. He gained a job in a London haberdashery business, married the daughter of the senior partner, and made himself rich through overseas investments: by the time he died in 1857 he was worth more than £6m.

Harriot Mellon was the illegitimate daughter of a poor Irish woman who looked after the wardrobe of a troupe of travelling actors. She learned from them how to act and came to London to star on the stage. There

The rich could spend £4 on a tall feather to wear in their hair – a sum that would have fed a labourer's family for 10 weeks

she caught the eye of the banker Thomas Coutts, who eventually married her. When he died, he left her his 50 per cent share in his bank, which she then controlled, enhancing its value and becoming the richest woman in England. Then she married the much younger Duke of St Albans and ended up both a multi-millionaire and a duchess.

But for every James Morrison and Harriot Mellon, there were millions who failed to bridge the chasm between rich and poor in early 19th-century Britain, and who were condemned to live and die in the poverty in which they were born. So what changed? The answer is that such poor living conditions gradually gave rise to public outrage – at both ends of the social spectrum. Workers' protests made the grievances increasingly clear; the religiously inspired social consciences of upper and middle-class social reformers did the rest.

Following the Great Reform Act in 1832 (which extended the franchise) and the abolition of slavery the following year, there was a greater political will to take responsibility for the welfare of people in Britain. Within two decades there were profound changes in urban sanitation, poor relief and working conditions in factories and mines. Gradually the difference in life expectancy between the poor and the rich declined – in fact, it constantly diminished between the 1870s and the 2010s.

But anyone who thinks of the early 19th century as a glorious age, when Britain was riding high on the profits of the industrial revolution and victory over France, should be aware: such wealth and glory had long, dark shadows. H

Ian Mortimer is a historian and author. His latest book, *The Time Traveller's Guide to Regency Britain*, will be published by Bodley Head in November. He will be discussing Regency Britain at our virtual event on 12 November. *historyextra.com/events/virtual-lecture*

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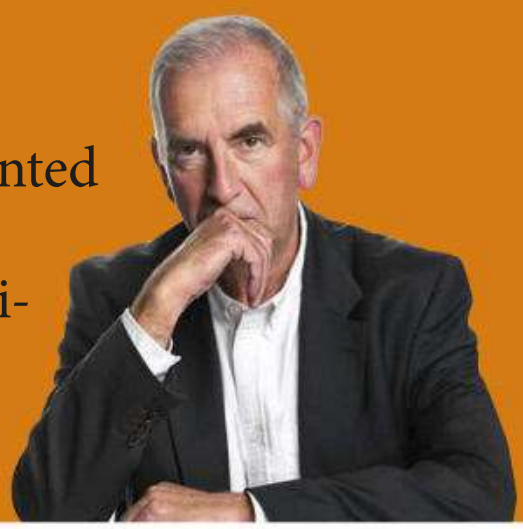
WATCH You can watch Lucy Worsley lift the lid on Regency Britain in the latest series of **Royal History's Biggest Fibs**, due to air on BBC Two in November

BOOKS

FICTION



"I've always been haunted by the V2 rocket, and struck by its extraordinary modernity"

Robert Harris on his new WW2 thriller novel, *V2* › page 83

GLOBAL

"To destroy a library is to erase part of the cultural memory of humankind"

Michael Wood reviews Richard Ovenden's *Burning the Books: A History of Knowledge Under Attack* › page 78

CULINARY HISTORY

"Food can be used as a fascinating prism through which to explore wider themes"

Annie Gray on *Scoff: A History of Food and Class* by Pen Vogler › page 81

INTELLIGENCE

"The book highlights Sonya's personal life, something often lacking in espionage biographies"

Michael Goodman reviews Ben Macintyre's *Agent Sonya* › page 82

INTERVIEW

"Wars have tended to compress the poles of society. Wages and taxation generally go up"

Margaret MacMillan discusses her new book, *War: How Conflict Shaped Us* › page 74

NICK GREGAN/ALAMY

INTERVIEW / MARGARET MACMILLAN

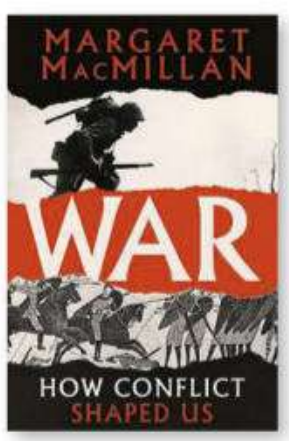
"We simply don't have any hope of stopping war unless we understand more about it"

MARGARET MACMILLAN talks to Ellie Cawthorne about her new book on war's mutating yet intrinsic role in human history – and why the continuation of conflict seems inevitable

Ellie Cawthorne: Your new book examines the close and often complex relationship between wars and societies throughout history. What do we need to understand about that relationship?
Margaret MacMillan: There's long been a sense that military history is something apart. It's toys for boys – all about guns, battles and strategy. Of course, that's part of it. But we need to understand that war also has a much more intimate relationship with human society. I see the relationship between war and societies as a two-way thing, and in my book I wanted to give a sense of that long intertwining. It's very difficult to untangle which comes first.

For too long we've wanted to avert our eyes from war, viewing it as something distasteful. But we don't do ourselves any service by that. We need to understand war. I don't think we have any hope of stopping it, in fact, unless we understand more about it.

How has war impacted on societies throughout history?
Big, demanding, expensive wars have tended to compress the poles of society. In fact, there are those who argue that the greatest times of social equality have been in the face of great catastrophes. Both wages and rates of taxation generally go up in war, which means that those who have a lot give a lot, while those who are at the bottom often come out better. You saw this in the 20th century – taxes went up, largely because of the need to fight wars, and never quite went back to normal. Governments discovered that they could squeeze far more wealth out of societies than they had suspected. And once governments know that, it's very hard to go back.



War: How Conflict Shaped Us
by Margaret MacMillan
(Profile, 320 pages, £20)

Wars have often benefited certain sections of society who were not well-treated beforehand. It was only after the First World War, for example, that some British women got the vote. That's a change that wouldn't have happened as quickly otherwise. The government recognised that it had depended on women to sustain the war effort. They simply couldn't deny them the vote any longer.

In more extreme instances, war has led to revolution. Russia's story would have played out very differently without the First World War. I don't think the Bolsheviks, who were a tiny little factional party at the time, could have taken power without it. That, of course, changed not only Russian history but also the history of the modern world.

And conflict has influenced our cultures in more subtle ways that we might not even notice. There is still a sort of fascination and glamour that surrounds war. Bookshops are crammed with war stories, and it's the subject of many video games and films. But I think the less you really know about war, the easier it is to be beguiled by it. That can be dangerous, because unless we understand how awful war is, we're inclined to take it lightly and underestimate the risks.

Another way that war can enact change is through supercharging technology and science. Can you give some examples?
Yes, things happen in wars which don't seem likely or even possible in peacetime, often because they're simply too expensive. But when it's a matter of survival, suddenly the question of expense becomes less important. The classic example is penicillin. Its ability to cure hitherto incurable diseases was discovered in the 1920s and 1930s, but it was too expensive to put into production. Along comes the Second World War, and the need to keep soldiers alive on battlefields. The ability to produce penicillin on an industrial scale that resulted from the war had an enormous and long-lasting impact on public health across the world. That just shows how the pressure of necessity speeds up innovation. It's a terribly costly way of making advances, but one of the paradoxes of war is that it does often produce social, technological and scientific change that can benefit people in peacetime.

What determines whether a society valorises or condemns war?
Who is in charge always matters. In the Middle Ages, those in command tended to be those with the resources for military equipment, who dominated their societies through sheer brute force. But war was very expensive. If you wanted to equip a knight in armour, you needed a lot of resources. You also didn't want ordinary farmers fighting, because they were much more valuable producing food. That meant that military virtues were confined to a small, elite class.

Cultural values also matter a lot. In 18th and 19th-century Prussia, for example, the most honourable career of all for the upper classes was the military. Young people were brought up to be brave, to accept discipline and be willing to sacrifice their lives – the sort of values that produce combatants. Of course, in other types of societies, people who are prepared to accept military discipline are regarded as not having much imagination or independent spirit.

The particular kinds of wars that societies fight always reflect their own values. For example, democracies fight wars in different ways to authoritarian societies, partly because they have different value structures. In authoritarian societies, it's easier for governments to make people fight. If you grew up expecting to die bravely on the battlefield, then you are already predisposed to fight, unlike in a democracy where we're taught every individual life ought to be

ROBERTO RICCIUTI–GETTY IMAGES

PROFILE

Margaret MacMillan's previous books include *The War that Ended Peace* (2013), *History's People* (2015) and *The Uses and Abuses of History* (2010). Her former academic posts include warden of St Antony's College and provost of Trinity College at Oxford University, and professor of history at the University of Toronto

valued. This means that democracies can only fight successful wars with public support. The two world wars had a tremendous amount of popular support in the Allied democracies, as people felt that they were 'just'. But democracies that fight unpopular wars end up usually not doing very well. Both the French and the United States had to pull out of Indochina because the wars they fought there were deeply unpopular, and they simply weren't able to sustain them.

You argue that while there are endless excuses for the beginnings of wars, there are just a few underlying causes for war. What have they been?

You can basically boil down why people go to war into three reasons. Firstly, people go to war out of fear. They need to defend themselves. They feel that those they love and their way of life is under attack. Secondly, people go to war because of greed. They want some of what someone else has – a piece of land, loot, or civilians to turn into slaves. The third reason people go to war is over ideas. People will fight and die for things like their nation, revolution or religion.

A Bolshevik propaganda poster celebrates the Russian Revolution of 1917 – a world-changing event that may not have happened without the First World War, argues Margaret MacMillan

While these basic motivations have come up time and time again, the means and methods of war have evolved beyond recognition. What are some of the transformational turning points?

The recurring pattern is that an innovative technology will come along, which precedes a successful new style of fighting. For example, when horses began to appear, it suddenly produced warriors who were much more mobile. For a time, warriors riding horses or driving chariots really carried all before them. When you think of the enormous empire-building power of the Mongols, that was largely down to the skill of warriors on horses to overwhelm troops on the ground.

Gunpowder was another such innovation. If you look at medieval castles, they have these lovely tall walls. But once you got heavy-duty cannon, those walls became a lot less of a protection. By the time you get to the 17th and 18th centuries, castles were much squatter and the walls much thicker, so they wouldn't be demolished by cannonballs.

In the modern era, a technological advance that made a huge difference was the internal combustion engine. When Napoleon marched his army into Russia in 1812, his force was probably about 600,000 strong. What really destroyed that army was hunger and cold, because there was no way to supply that number of troops. But by the 1870s, that would no longer have been the case. With the emergence of the railway it became possible to move enormous numbers of troops and crucially, keep them supplied. That meant you could keep them in the field much longer. There are always innovations, but sometimes it takes a while for us to catch up and learn how to use them.

What do you see as the hallmarks of war in the modern era?

War changed hugely in the 19th century, partly as a result of the industrial revolution, and partly also as a result of the growth of mass society, when people participated in public life and the affairs of their government. Given the massive increase in the scale of war in the 19th century, I sometimes think that perhaps people shouldn't have been surprised when the First World War came, with its huge number of combatants.

In the 19th and 20th centuries, industrial nations developed an enormous capacity to produce consumer goods, which made life better for lots of people. But along with that, they gained the capacity to kill people on literally an industrial scale. Once you got automation, standardised parts and assembly lines, it became possible to produce an awful lot more equipment. This wasn't just guns. It was boots, caps, shoes – anything and everything that a body of men might need. You can have all sorts of brave people, but if they don't have boots or food, even the bravest people can't fight for long.

Something else that really came into focus in the 19th century is that people began to feel a passionate attachment to something called 'the nation'. People were prepared to fight and die for this abstraction, which resulted in the motivation to fight bigger wars.

All of this led to the emergence of what we would call 'total war'. That means mobilising all a society's resources – brains, capacities, money, materials – for the purpose of waging war. But it's also about what you're willing to do to the other side. You're no longer just going after those who are fighting. You're going after the entire social, economic and political structure supporting them. Increasingly, we see attacks on civilians, and attempts to weaken morale and undermine the confidence of people in their own governments. Total war really becomes a question of society against society.

How have ideas about the acceptable boundaries of conflict changed over time?

It may seem futile, but throughout history we've made attempts to limit war and indeed outlaw it. The ancient Greeks had rules about when one side would concede, rather like a sporting match. The medieval church was always trying to say, "no, you mustn't attack priests", and bring in rules against fighting on holy days. Now we have the Geneva Conventions to dictate how civilians should be treated. But although there is a body of law in existence, we often ignore it.

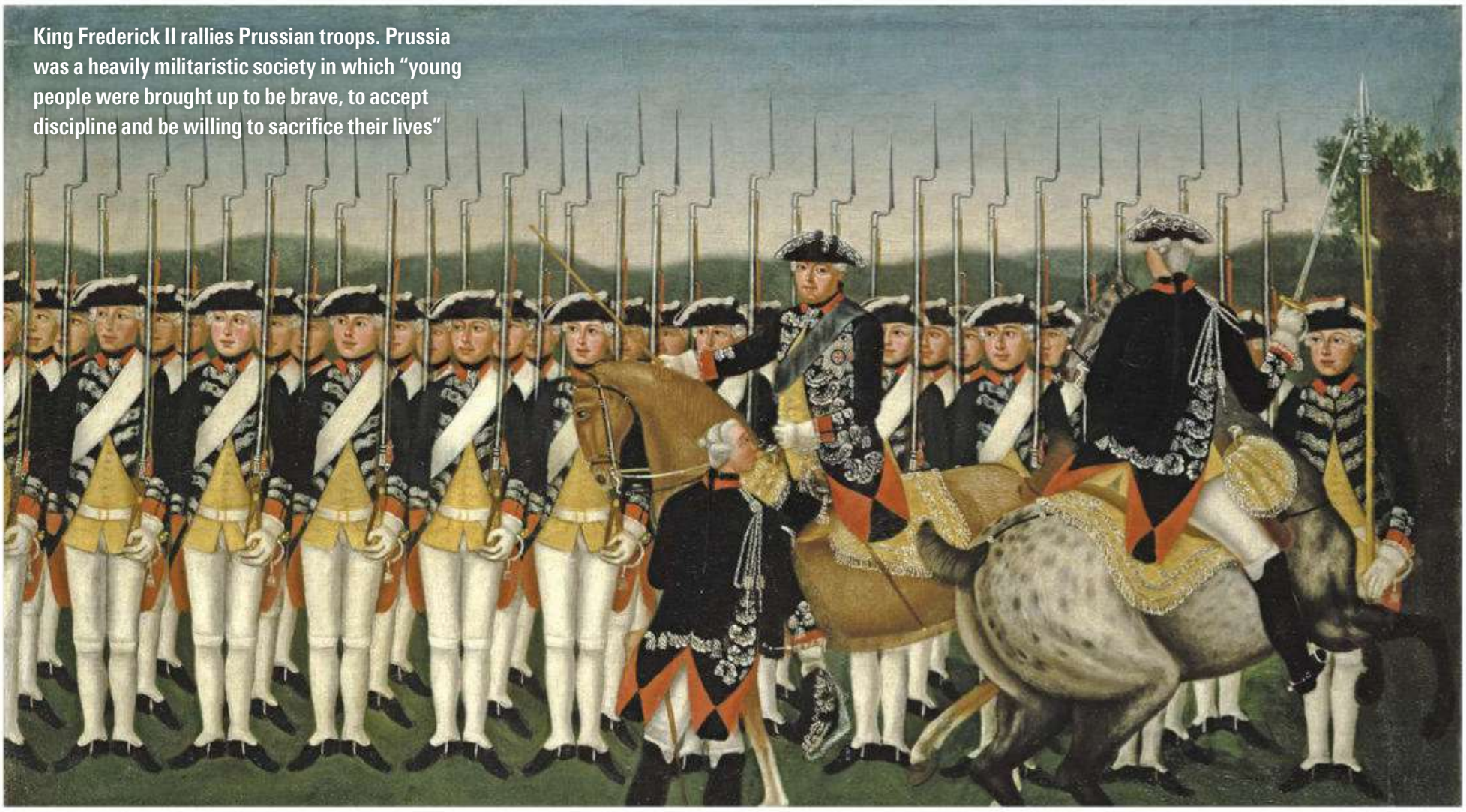
I think that shifting boundaries of war are probably more about changing means than changing morality. You can look back at the past and find countless attacks on civilians. In the Middle Ages, for example, there was a technique called chevauchée, where if you couldn't get at a leader holed up in his castle, instead you would devastate the surrounding countryside, killing his workers and farmers as a way of forcing him to surrender. Attacking civilians has a very long history. But in the 20th century it became possible to get at the other society in ways that hadn't been possible before. The means of actually disrupting enemy societies became so much greater.

Has humanity become more or less violent?

That's a huge debate. Steven Pinker and others have argued that we're

> **"Industrial nations developed an enormous capacity to produce consumer goods. But along with that, they gained the capacity to kill on literally an industrial scale"**

ALAMY



King Frederick II rallies Prussian troops. Prussia was a heavily militaristic society in which "young people were brought up to be brave, to accept discipline and be willing to sacrifice their lives"

The forces of Turkic conqueror Timur attack Smyrna (now İzmir) in 1402. "In the Middle Ages, those in command tended to be those with the resources for military equipment, who dominated through sheer brute force," says Margaret MacMillan

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becoming a gentler people, seen in the fact that there's less domestic violence and animal cruelty in many countries. But I think that organised violence – or war – is something different.

On the surface of it, a lot of western societies are no longer militaristic in the ways they once were. Sweden, for example, was highly militarised in the 17th and 18th centuries. If you heard the Swedes were coming, you got out of town because they were known as ferocious soldiers. Of course, it's very different now.

We like to think that we've enjoyed a long period of peace in the west since 1945, but perhaps we have not looked closely enough. The Troubles in Northern Ireland only ended in 1998. And what happened in Yugoslavia in the 1990s can't be classed as part of any 'long peace'. Then, what about the rest of the world? In a sense, western countries have just exported war elsewhere. The French and the US in Indochina, for example, funded groups to prolong wars in another part of the world. We've also witnessed, even in supposedly peaceful countries, prolonged civil unrest with a lot of violence. Latin America, for instance, has not seen a major state-to-state war for a very long time, but it's had an awful lot of violent internal conflict. And so I don't think we should see this period as free from violence. Certain societies have just been fortunate enough not to experience it at home.

What do you foresee as the future of conflict?

Predicting the future is always a tricky business, but what I suspect we're going to see is the growth of very high-tech war – war that's increasingly automated and relies on artificial intelligence. We're already seeing war moving into space, in spite of international treaties, and war moving into the cyber world.

But I also suspect what we may see at the other end of the scale is continuing low-level wars that rumble on, overlooked by the rest of the world: around the Great Lakes in Africa, in Afghanistan, in Syria and other parts of the Middle East. They will not be high-tech wars, by and large, but as we've seen, you don't need high-tech weapons to kill large numbers of other people. A lot of the killings in Rwanda were done with machetes and hoes.

So you think that war will continue to be an intrinsic part of human history?

The fact that there will be war in the future, I think is almost certain. There are still those who see war as a tool for getting what they want. Political leaders are still prepared to contemplate war to achieve their own ends. You certainly see that with the various warlords engaged in conflict in places such as Afghanistan. I do worry about nuclear proliferation, which I predict will happen. Nuclear weapons are now much stronger, easier to deliver and simpler to acquire than they were during the Cold War.

We need to think really seriously about these things, because the capacity of war to destroy humanity and the planet is much greater than it was even 10 years ago. H

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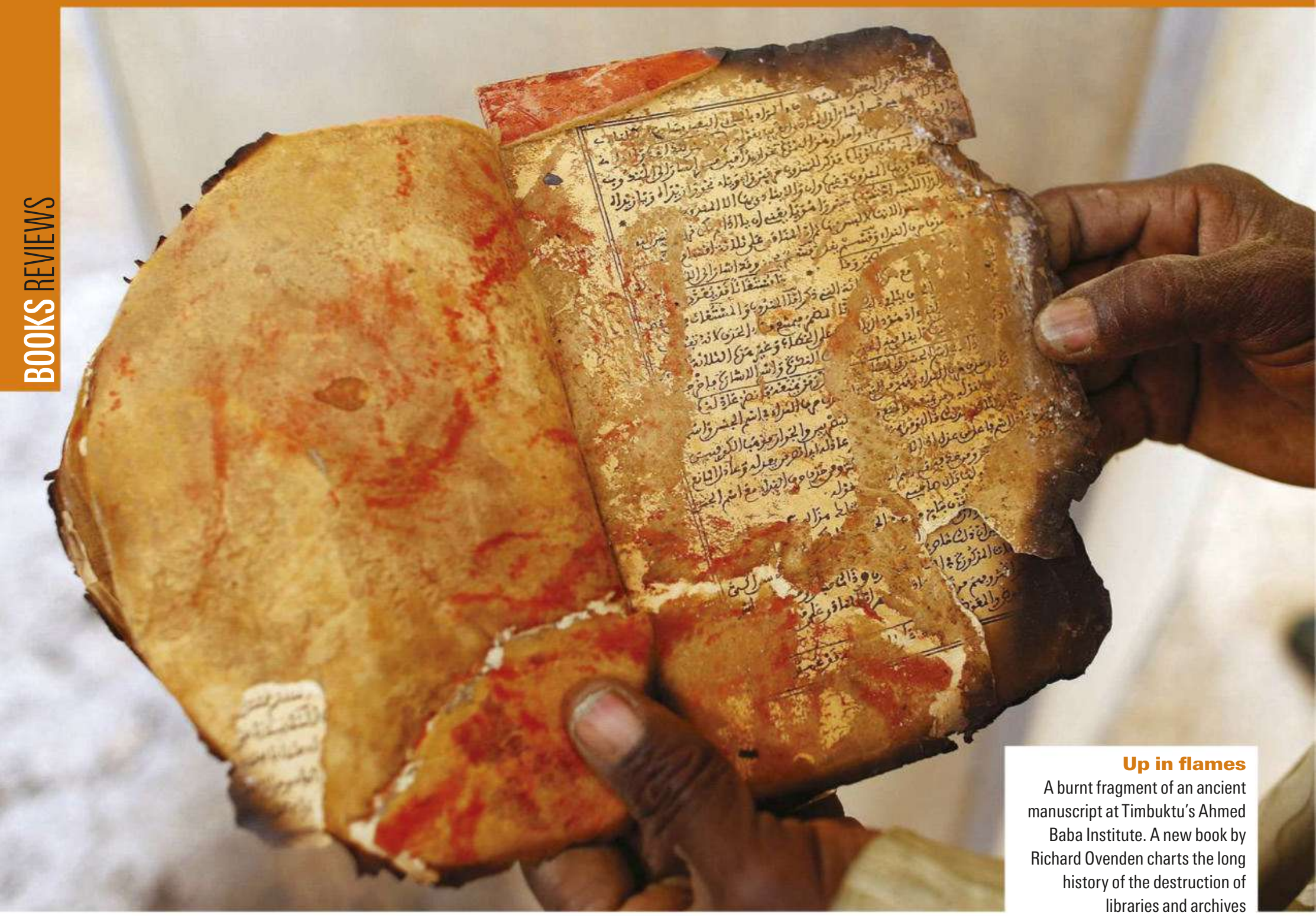
Listen to an extended version of this interview with Margaret MacMillan on our podcast soon at **historyextra.com/podcast**



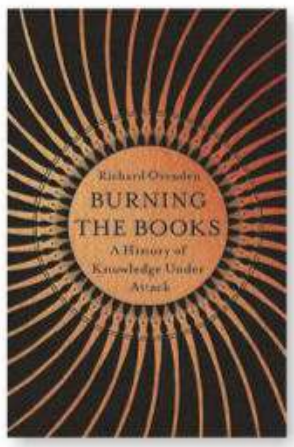
Up in flames
A burnt fragment of an ancient manuscript at Timbuktu's Ahmed Baba Institute. A new book by Richard Ovenden charts the long history of the destruction of libraries and archives

REUTERS

KNOWLEDGE

Wisdom on the bonfire

MICHAEL WOOD recommends a wide-ranging book that documents the destruction of knowledge throughout history and holds a stark warning about the consequences



Burning the Books: A History of Knowledge Under Attack
by Richard Ovenden
John Murray, 320 pages, £20

In the late 10th century, a golden age of Islamic culture, the Baghdad bibliographer Al-Nadim told a legend of a wonderful library beyond the eastern edge of the Muslim world. It was: "a treasury of books in which are preserved all the sciences of Earth and heaven, the chronology of times past and times future… a place barred to all save those of the highest wisdom. Anyone permitted to see it is seized with a violent emotion in which impatience, sadness and a longing that captivates the heart are mingled with a fear lest this library may be destroyed or ruined forever."

This tale came to mind when reading Richard Ovenden's fascinating new book with its stories of real lost libraries, from Nineveh and Alexandria to Sarajevo, Mosul and Timbuktu. Over its pages, Ovenden charts the history of knowledge under attack and of the fight to preserve it against all the odds. It couldn't be better timed, too, as the internet and social media are swamped by fake history, false information and so-called 'alternative facts'. And, as librarian of Oxford's Bodleian Library, Ovenden could hardly be better placed to write it. Opening its doors to scholars in 1602, the Bodleian is one of the great libraries and archives of the world, and this book is richly illuminated by examples from its famous collections.

Ovenden tells us that the origin of his book was an op-ed in the *Financial Times*

about the Windrush scandal, and the revelation that the landing cards for those who had arrived in Britain legally in 1948 were then destroyed in 2010 (following a decision taken the previous year). This was not done maliciously, Ovenden thinks, but was still an unbelievably incompetent act that was insensitive to the meaning of history. What has happened since only proves the point. Requiring retirement-age British citizens to justify their presence in the country by producing documentary proof when the government itself had destroyed key documents is a situation worthy of Kafka's *The Trial* or Orwell's *1984*.

Burning the Books then is not only about archives, but about the construction of history itself. It's also about the fight for an open society, which as Ovenden passionately argues, depends on libraries and archives. Wherever violence, war, fascism and ethnic hatred have reared their heads, books are burned. Religious fanaticism, too, has played its part: the theologian and the book burner have often gone hand in hand.

And no society is immune. As Ovenden shows, the wrecking of English libraries by Henry VIII during the dissolution of the monasteries was the biggest act of heritage destruction in British history. Of Glastonbury's famous library, only 40 books and fragments survive today from the couple of thousand listed in the 1248 catalogue, which no doubt was much bigger by the time it was destroyed in 1539. His tale of the British burning of Washington's Library of Congress in 1814 is simply chilling.

The book is also about the importance of good reading. Ovenden's touching description of his schooldays in the public library in Deal will resonate with many. For me, it sparked memories of the Central Library in my home city of Manchester, founded during the Depression as "a pioneer work for all classes in the community". Around the great dome of the reading room ran the words: "Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom; and with all thy getting, get understanding."

Of course, most of us now use the internet as a major source of information, but nothing can replace physical archives and the real documents. Libraries are the repositories of our primary source material as nations and communities. Their function may have changed, but now that even the rarest manuscripts are available in digitised formats, we are entering a new age for archives – a long way from the travelling library that came to my part of Wythenshawe on Tuesday nights.

Ovenden ends with an eloquent defence of libraries and archives, arguing that they are not static repositories but active living sources of sustenance for our communal life. He has five main points. Libraries support the education of society as a whole, and of specific communities within it; they provide diversity of knowledge, ideas and beliefs; they support the well-being of citizens and the principles of an open society – for example through the preservation of our key rights, showing how we got them, and hence enabling us to hold decision makers to account. They also help root societies in their cultural and historical identities by preserving a record of that culture and history, while still enabling us to find new ways of looking at ourselves and our past.

"Wherever violence, war, fascism and ethnic hatred have reared their heads, books are burned. Religious fanaticism, too, has played its part"

Finally, archives provide a fixed reference point, allowing truth and falsehood to be judged through transparency, verification, and accurate citation of the primary evidence. When the scholar and poet AE Housman found in Oxford a lost fragment written by the Roman poet Juvenal, he wrote: "Nemesis [goddess of retribution] brought it from the Arsenals of Divine Vengeance, if I may so describe the Bodleian Library." Housman hits on an enduring truth here: about the power of the past to disprove the mendacities of the present and hold them to account.

Fears about the destruction of knowledge are still real and ever present. Humankind's efforts to create beauty, justice and order are forever shadowed by the forces of destruction and irrationalism: the wiping out of the accumulated wisdom and art of humanity, the very things that give meaning and value to life on Earth. To destroy a library is to erase part of the cultural memory of humankind – in a sense, to erase identity itself.

So let us hope Nemesis will continue to wield her power, to guide us and to enrich us. One can only give thanks, then, to her good servant Richard Ovenden. One of the many achievements of this important, exhilarating book will surely be to inspire a new generation of archivists. Librarians rule! H

Michael Wood's latest book is *The Story of China: A Portrait of a Civilisation and its People* (Simon & Schuster, 2020)

EKOW F. OLIVER/MATTHEW GUILLORY/LIBI PEDDER

AUTHORS ON THE PODCAST

Stella Dadzie on enslaved women in the West Indies

"One of the myths that surrounds enslaved women is that men did all the hard labour. But plantation records reveal that on many of the large estates across the West Indies, women made up the vast majority of the field gangs. This could be because women were seen to have more stamina. There was also very little difference between the price of a man and the price of a woman, suggesting that their labour was seen as equal."

Siân Evans on female transatlantic travellers

"The interwar period was an era when many women experienced autonomy, freedom of movement and independence for the first time. They crossed the Atlantic for all sorts of reasons. There was a shortage of men after the First World War, so some women went in search of a bigger gene pool, as it were. There were others who realised that they couldn't rely on male relatives and needed their own careers. And there were also women who had worked during the war and were in search of personal autonomy."

Kerri Greenidge on America's history of black activism

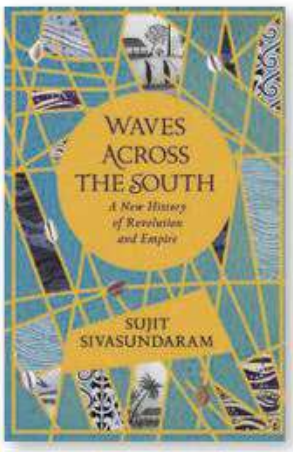
"I would like this book to challenge our notion of what black protest looks like, and where black protest exists. There are clusters of places in the US that tend to get studied, but there are places outside of Harlem, Brooklyn and Chicago where African-American communities have been waging these battles for generations."

MORE FROM US Listen to these episodes and more for free at **historyextra.com/podcast**

GLOBAL

Oceans between us

DILIP MENON praises a bold re-examination of colonial encounters in the global south, which highlights the often overlooked role of oceans in the spread of the British empire



Waves Across the South: A New History of Revolution and Empire
by Sujit Sivasundaram
William Collins,
496 pages, £25

Humans squat by the ocean as "frogs around a pond", as Plato insightfully observed in *Phaedo*. But although land occupies a mere third of the Earth's surface, the history of oceans and maritime engagement has long been subordinated to a terrestrial imagination.

Amnesia has long attended on histories of the British empire, which have more often been written as accounts of the conquest of land and territorial settlement through 'savage wars of peace'. *Waves Across the South*, however, brilliantly reconstructs how empire was made through voyages across oceans – the Indian and the Pacific – and engages with a diverse patchwork of actors, states, cultures and religions.

Conventional histories of empire record a history of pacification and the spread of the values of enlightenment and democracy, taken up with eager enthusiasm by natives in parched landscapes of indignity. Examining a crucial period in European history, 'the age of revolutions' between 1789 and 1850, Sujit Sivasundaram cleverly overturns this inherited narrative.

He shows how across a swathe of land from America to Australia, taking in places as diverse as South Africa, Mauritius, Oman, Sri Lanka, India, Burma, Penang, Tasmania and New Zealand, the British were the agents of counter-revolution, imposing forms of authority congenial to their imperial rule. Instead of spreading the values of equality and liberty, more often than not, early empire was about suppressing these in the interests of property, law, and order.

This is not to say that there was no indigenous agency at play. What the book shows in meticulous detail is how native monarchies, merchants and marauders used the imported rhetoric from Europe in order to negotiate and manipulate for local advantage. Even the much vaunted technological and military superiority of the British foundered in the unknown terrains over which they sought control. The slowness of the spread of news and information across the oceans meant that European ideas arrived as distant echoes in a worldwide game of Chinese whispers.

Culture clash The storming of a Rangoon stockade during the First Anglo-Burmese War (1824–26). A new book characterises the spread of the British empire across the Indian Ocean as a story of counter-revolution

> **"The slow spread of news across the oceans meant that European ideas arrived as distant echoes in a worldwide game of Chinese whispers"**

The slow emergence and consolidation of empire meant that the worlds of land and islands were severed as a terrestrial ideology triumphed, and the stories of the global south in the making of the British empire were effaced. As Sivasundaram observes, the British neutralised "the age of revolutions, an age of indigenous assertion, and co-opted concepts of liberty, free trade, reason, progress, printed expression and even projections of selfhood". Once Britannia ruled the waves, the world of the ocean, overflowing with ideas, goods and people, could be forgotten. Only after decolonisation would these histories of the global south and the role of oceans in shaping empire re-emerge.

This book is an exemplar of historical writing that takes up the challenge of the Caribbean poet and theorist Édouard Glissant to work with an "archipelagic imagination" and makes the oceans explode into the land. H

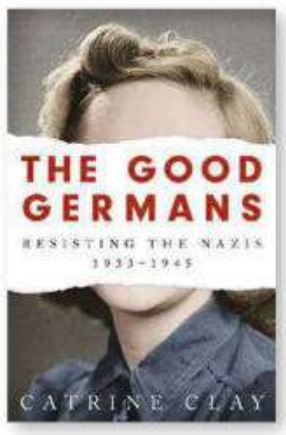
Dilip Menon is Mellon Chair in Indian studies at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, South Africa

BRIDGEMAN

WW2

Fighting fascism

HESTER VAIZEY on a book that highlights that not all Germans were seduced by Nazism



The Good Germans: Resisting the Nazis 1933–1945
by Catrine Clay
Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 416 pages, £20

Julius Leber was one of many Germans who found themselves at odds with the Nazis when they rose to power. As a leading Social Democrat, he was promptly imprisoned in 1933, where he stoically remained for four years. Upon his release, he began to make plans to bring down the regime, his conviction unwavering.

Facing the watchful eye of the Gestapo, Leber worked hard to avoid detection, quickly learning the skills of deception: jumping on trams and trains at the last minute, doubling back, wearing disguises, joining spurious 'clubs' which were covers for seditious activities, never using the telephone for anything important, and always looking out for informers. This was not a path of action for the faint-hearted. The reality of Leber's day-to-day life was a far cry from the image of Germans peddled by the Nazi propaganda ministry, intent on depicting uniform enthusiasm and commitment to Hitler and the party. But how typical was he?

Historians have long grappled with the question of how popular the Nazis really were. During the Second World War, it was convenient for the Allies to conflate the Germans and the Nazis into one, to unite their troops against a common enemy. Inevitably, the true situation was more complex. Not all Germans were brainwashed, hoodwinked or hypnotised into becoming ardent supporters of National Socialism. Many Germans were not Nazis but just tried to keep their heads down and protect their families. This passivity in itself played into the hands of the regime, enabling it to further the Nazi agenda.

> **"There was much more resistance in Nazi Germany than was ever formally recorded. Not all Germans were brainwashed"**

In among this group, however, were hundreds of thousands of Germans who did resist the Nazi regime. *The Good Germans* suggests that there was much more resistance than was ever formally recorded. It features six ordinary Germans, including Julius Leber, who witnessed the rise of Nazism from within and were motivated to resist for different reasons.

We join the popular writer Rudolph Ditzen (better known under his pen name, Hans Fallada, as the author of *Alone in Berlin*), as he plays cat and mouse with the regime, negotiating the party's desire to bring him into the fold and write for them with his own distaste for Nazi values.

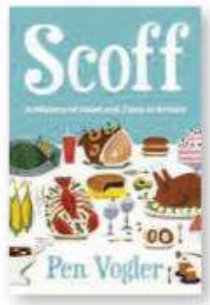
We also follow the trials and tribulations of a teenage girl called Irma, who is growing up with her famous father, the communist leader Ernst Thälmann, behind bars. Schooled in all the methods of subterfuge, she becomes involved with the workers who sabotaged the warships and fighter planes, distributed anti-Nazi leaflets in shipyards, and placed stickers on the windows of trains and buses.

The Good Germans shines the spotlight on people who didn't opt for the path of conformity, but instead made often small but nonetheless defiant choices in their everyday lives that put them at risk. Perhaps greater analysis of what these six stories tell us about the wider extent of resistance to Nazi rule would have supported the thesis – suggested in the book's opening – that such resistance has been underestimated. Nonetheless, Clay's background as a director and producer of award-winning television documentaries shows. She is a great storyteller who proves adept at conjuring her characters straight off the page. H

Hester Vaizey is the author of *Surviving Hitler's War: Family Life in Nazi Germany* (Macmillan, 2010)

FOOD

On snobbery and snacking



Scoff: A History of Food and Class in Britain
by Pen Vogler
Atlantic Books, 480 pages, £20

The history of food, as with any subject-based history, can be interesting in its own right, but it is when it is used as a prism through which to explore wider themes that it becomes truly fascinating. In her latest book, Pen Vogler moves away from writing purely food-in-literature-based books to consider the intersection of food and class throughout history.

The introduction is clear-sighted and punchy, posing questions around the supposed universality of food preferences, the right to choose one's diet, and the thorny issue of who gets to say what is or isn't desirable. This isn't a weighty tome though – not a companion volume to the recent spate of books on governmental policy or food futures – rather a speedy set of essays on specific foods and historical dining practices.

Vogler's prose is snappy, her examples mainly drawn from literature – a joyously eclectic mix which sees Jane Austen happily rubbing shoulders with Jilly Cooper. And her experience of actually cooking the foods of the past (mainly) stops her falling into generalisations based merely on written sources.

Many of the essays are excellent, especially those concentrating on the long 18th century. Dinner parties, ice cream, gin, tripe and almond milk, for example, all stand out. Others are less good. Some are merely narrative. There are strange choices in what to include both within the chapters – missing out key influences or skipping centuries – and in the choice of topics. For instance, pommes parmentier seems an odd subject for an entire essay when the very large and class-oriented topic of cheese is covered with only a combined entry on cheddar and stilton. As a result, Vogler does not always fulfil the promise of the introductory chapter.

It is a fun read, though, with some fabulous facts, tied together in an engaging and thought-provoking way. H

Annie Gray, food historian and author of *Victory in the Kitchen: The Life of Churchill's Cook* (Profile, 2020)

ESPIONAGE

Double life

MICHAEL S GOODMAN enjoys a rollicking spy thriller that tells the story of the mother who moonlighted as one of the Soviet Union's most valuable intelligence agents

Agent Sonya: Lover, Mother, Soldier, Spy
by Ben Macintyre
Penguin, 400 pages, £25

Ursula Kuczynski, AKA Sonya, AKA Ursula Burton, AKA Ruth Werner, was a remarkable woman. Ten years old when the Bolsheviks launched their revolution, she was 82 when the Berlin wall was pulled down. Kuczynski attained the rank of colonel in Soviet intelligence, the highest position a female spy held in the Soviet Union. She was an agent runner par excellence, but under the mysticism was a mother of three who frequently had to balance the duties of being a spy with those of running a family.

Kuczynski's story is reasonably well known. After all, she wrote a memoir and several fictional stories that were quasi-autobiographical. But Macintyre's re-telling has the distinct advantage of drawing on numerous recently released MI5 files, as well as unpublished sources and interviews. The result is what we've come to expect of the UK's favourite popular spy author: a cracking yarn that roars along at great speed.

Born in Germany to Jewish parents, she joined the Communist party around the age of 19, drawn by a combination of idealism and the simple fact that the communists were the primary group opposing the Nazis. In 1930 she left for China, where her first real brush with espionage came at the hands of Richard Sorge, the notorious Soviet spy and womaniser who would subsequently be executed by the Japanese.

Fearful of Japanese intentions, she left China for the Soviet Union, where she became a paid-up member of Soviet military intelligence. After networks she was working with in Poland and Switzerland were exposed (through no fault of her own), she left for England, where she became the de facto chief of the illegal Soviet network.

While Kuczynski had some intelligence successes in China, Poland and Switzerland, it was in wartime England that she excelled as a handler and agent runner. Her most important agent was the physicist, Klaus Fuchs, an integral member of the wartime atomic bomb programme. Following the defection of a fellow Soviet spy, she escaped from Britain before she could be caught and settled back into Germany, where she remained until her death. In 1956 she decided to end her espionage career and became a hugely successful writer.

Agent Sonya, as the subtitle of the book suggests, is about much more than her espionage career, though. One of the book's most riveting aspects is how Kuczynski balanced espionage – her real calling – with the demands of motherhood. From the outset she used her home for secret meetings, and there is a strong sense that she opted to send her children to boarding school in order to maintain her career without interruption.

> **She was an agent runner par excellence, but under the mysticism was a mother of three balancing the duties of spying with running a family**

Secrets and lies Ursula Kuczynski, AKA Agent Sonya, pictured in 1936. A new book by Ben Macintyre follows her challenging life and career as one of the Soviet Union's most significant spies

COURTESY OF PETER BEURTON

Another aspect that comes through is Kuczynski's absolute devotion to communism. Despite her shock in 1939 at the signing of the Nazi-Soviet non-aggression pact, she remained steadfast in her beliefs. Although she was most contented in England, when trouble came she did not hesitate to escape, even though it meant leaving a large Cotswolds family home for a cramped one-bedroom flat in East Berlin. Even when confronted with Stalin's excesses, she remained a loyal believer.

One final element to the book that has not been told before is the counterintelligence angle. Just how did she get away with her work for so long, especially when there were concerns about her communist brother and husband? Indeed, MI5 declared her a "threat", and even interrogated her on a number of occasions, but somehow she managed to evade arrest. The solution to this conundrum has often been seen in the form of Sir Roger Hollis, director-general of MI5 from 1956 to 1965, whom Kuczynski possibly met in China in the early 1930s, and who personally signed some of the orders to desist in pursuing her. Macintyre's conclusion on Hollis is far from definitive, but interesting nonetheless: "Hollis was not treacherous, but incompetent. He was really quite thick."

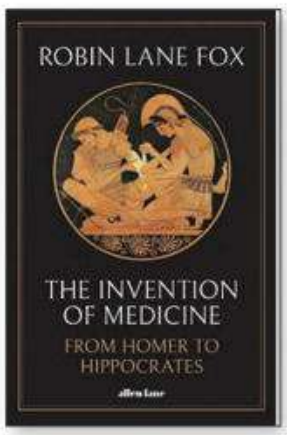
Macintyre has done Kuczynski proud with this great book. At times it may be prone to hyperbole, but it very effectively highlights and contrasts the career with the personal life of the spy, something so often lacking in espionage biographies. A last word has to be reserved for the other great heroine that emerges from these pages: Milicent Bagot, the MI5 counterintelligence officer who desperately tried to prove Kuczynski was a Soviet agent. It is worth reading for the chapter on Bagot alone, but I urge everyone to put it on their Christmas wish lists. H

Michael S Goodman is professor of intelligence and international affairs at King's College London

MEDICINE

Doctor's orders

JOHN WILKINS on a book that charts the work of some of the ancient world's most innovative medical practitioners



The Invention of Medicine
by Robin Lane Fox
Allen Lane, 432 pages, £25

With uncanny timing, *The Invention of Medicine* has been published as medical science struggles to meet an immense medical challenge. In it, Robin Lane Fox follows the history of the Greek doctors linked with the name of Hippocrates of Cos, and their development of medicine based on natural causes rather than supernatural intervention. He radically redates their earliest texts to the years following 470 BC, making this some of the earliest Greek prose, scientific or otherwise.

Never before has medicine been put so squarely at the centre of ancient life. Lane Fox is a delight to read: he writes with breadth of knowledge, wit and infectious enthusiasm. Full of insight and detail, the narrative takes readers through many areas of cultural development, seeking, wherever possible, to link modern concerns with ancient comparisons (climatic concerns, but no knowledge of viruses). He writes with panache and a distinctive voice.

The flourishing island of Thasos in the northern Aegean is where the doctors' patients were mostly located. The travelling doctors noted conditions in patients particular to a place, season and climate. Collected in works entitled *Epidemics*, these impressive and early case records follow the patient's condition from first falling ill to recovery or death: they observe changes and bodily effluents, since understanding of the body's internal structure was limited. These case studies were written for other doctors who might encounter similar conditions.

Lane Fox contends that the oldest two of the seven books of case studies should in fact be dated much earlier than the current date of 410–407 BC that's given to them. His lifelong study of Alexander the Great and northern Greece is brought to bear on Thasos. Drawing on named patients and their locations in the city, he builds their profiles into the historical record. Hippocratic scholars have long depended on the magistrate lists of Thasos preserved on marble: Lane Fox proposes the names actually belong to two generations earlier. Thasos at this period was restoring its walls, hence a doctor's reference to a new wall. The later rebuilding of the walls after 410 is rejected, as the conditions recorded include no mention of the wounds and famine brought by factional fighting in the later period.

> **"These early case records follow the patient's condition from first falling ill to recovery or death"**

A woman undergoes medical treatment in this Greek marble relief from the fifth-century BC

Medical scholars will test the claims against other Hippocratic texts; epigraphers likewise the reading of the inscriptions (Lane Fox presents the latest research and dissents from it): this will take time. But general readers can revel in this authoritative assertion of Thasian culture in the mid-fifth century: its artistic flourishing, buildings, street life and economic strength. Sceptics will say that patients' names coincide with known names by chance, or that their locations have been misinterpreted. But Lane Fox has given readers the chance to study ancient men and women, rich and poor – and their illnesses – within their distinctive social and cultural environment. H

John Wilkins is emeritus professor of classics and ancient history at the University of Exeter

GETTY IMAGES

FROM FACT TO FICTION

Rocket science

Robert Harris on his propulsive new WW2 thriller, *V2*

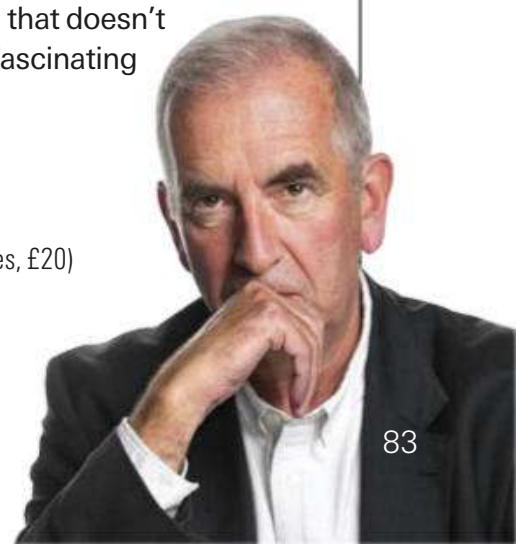
What can you tell us about your latest novel, *V2*?
The action takes place over five days at the end of November 1944, as V2 missiles are launched on London by Germans hidden in occupied Holland. I tell the story through two characters: a German rocket scientist attached to the military unit firing the rockets, and a member of the WAAF. She works in reconnaissance and is a victim of a V2 rocket strike in the early pages of the book.

What was it about the V2 rocket that captured your imagination?
I've always been haunted by the V2 and struck by its extraordinary modernity. It was a sort of hinge between conventional warfare and the missile-based warfare we see today. There was also a kind of Faustian pact in its development, as a group of idealistic teenagers who played around with rockets in the 1920s happened to collide with the advent of the Nazi regime, when money was poured into rearmament.

Why are you drawn to the Second World War as a setting?
To anyone who says: "Why are you so obsessed with the Second World War?", I reply: "Why aren't you?" I think that it was the most important single event in human history. And it was thrilling. People were at the very edge of their characters, and it was hugely high stakes. There were still bombsites around when I grew up, and the war dominated popular entertainment. I was so steeped in it that although I wasn't alive at the time, I almost feel like I was.

What are the key ingredients of a great historical novel?
A feeling of immersion for the reader. And a propulsive story, if you can pull that off. It doesn't really matter what period it's set in – there's no era that doesn't have something fascinating about it.

V2
by Robert Harris
(Hutchinson, 320 pages, £20)



Look out for our virtual lecture series

BBC HISTORY MAGAZINE LIVE

We are hosting a programme of virtual events this autumn and winter, online and available globally. Wherever you are, tune in to see one of our renowned historians talking about their new book. Each lecture lasts 45 minutes and is followed by a 15-minute Q&A session. You'll also have the opportunity to pre-order a signed copy of the book via independent bookseller Fox Lane Books.

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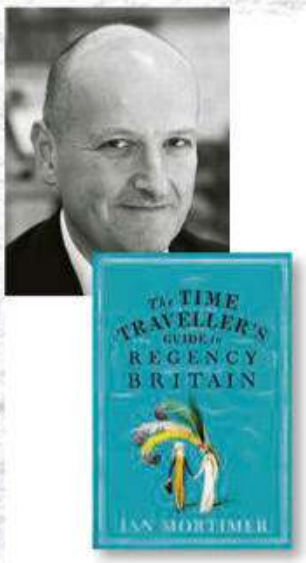
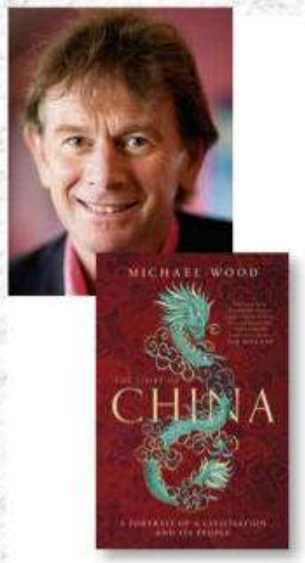


Ian Mortimer
The Time Traveller's Guide to Regency Britain

A time of exuberance, thrills, frills and unchecked bad behaviour, the Regency was perhaps the last age of true freedom before the arrival of the stifling world of Victorian morality. It was also a period of transition that reflected unprecedented social, economic and political change.

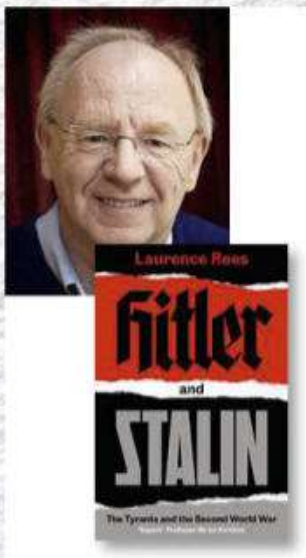
Thursday 12 November 2020, 7pm



Michael Wood
The Story of China: A Portrait of a Civilisation and its People

Michael Wood shares stories from his highly praised new book, a grand sweep of the history of the world's oldest continuous civilisation: "a tale of astounding drama, fabulous creativity and deep humanity".

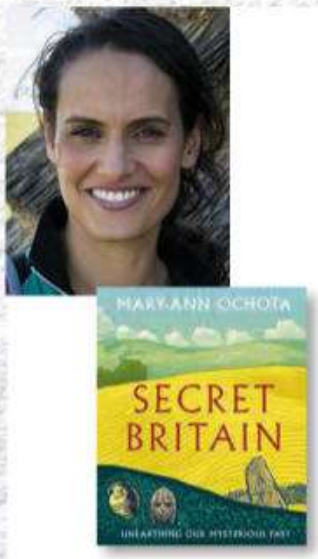
Tuesday 22 December 2020, 7pm



Laurence Rees
Hitler and Stalin: The Tyrants and the Second World War

Laurence Rees has met hundreds of people who experienced life under Hitler's and Stalin's rule – not just those who suffered, but those who enthusiastically supported the dictators, too. Over the years he started thinking about the comparison between the leaders and their regimes. What were the key differences? And in what ways were the regimes similar?

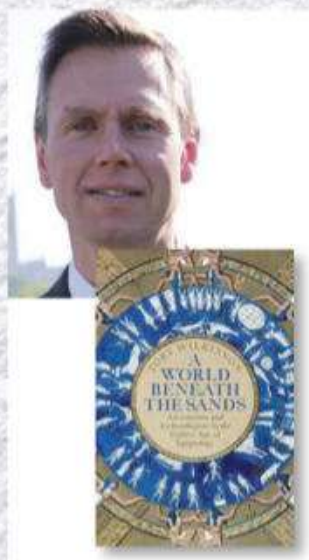
Thursday 26 November 2020, 7pm



Mary-Ann Ochota
Secret Britain: Unearthing the Nation's Most Mysterious Archaeology

Talk details still to be confirmed.

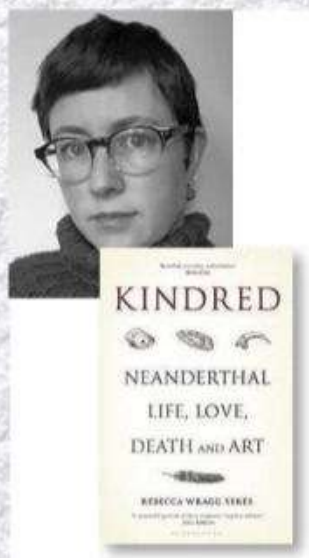
Thursday 14 January 2021, 7pm



Toby Wilkinson
A World Beneath the Sands: The Rediscovery of Ancient Egypt

Meet the men and women whose obsession with Egypt's ancient civilisation drove them to uncover its secrets. Their work helped to enrich and transform our understanding of the Nile valley and its people, and left a lasting impression on Egypt, too.

Thursday 10 December 2020, 7pm



Rebecca Wragg Sykes
Kindred: Neanderthal Life, Love, Death and Art

Talk details still to be confirmed.

Thursday 28 January 2021, 7pm

GETTY IMAGES/FRAN MONKS/MICK KAVANAGH

Tickets cost £10. Book now at **historyextra.com/events/virtual-lecture**

WORDS BY **ELLIE CAWTHORNE** AND **MATT ELTON**

ELLE ALSO ON THE BOOKSHELF

FICTION

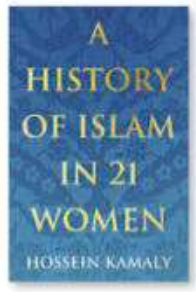
War Lord
by Bernard Cornwell
(HarperCollins, 352 pages, £20)

Epic ending

With his 13th book set in the warring kingdoms of ninth and tenth-century England, Bernard Cornwell is finally bringing the story of Uhtred of Bebbanburg to a dramatic conclusion. His hero has returned to the 'last kingdom' of Northumbria and faces threats from all sides. Battle is looming. Cornwell superfans should look out for the collector's edition featuring a specially designed gold-foil case.

GLOBAL

A History of Islam in 21 Women
by Hossein Kamaly
(Oneworld, 261 pages, £9.99)
NOW IN PAPERBACK

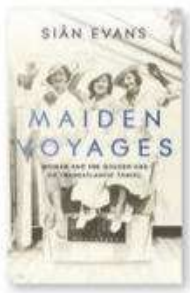


World-changing women

From Fatima, the seventh-century daughter of the Prophet Muhammad, to the Second World War spy Noor Inayat Khan, this book offers biographical sketches of 21 remarkable Muslim women. Kamaly invites his readers to use these diverse stories (ranging widely across the globe and millennia) to ruminate on women's often-overlooked "active and decisive presence" in the history of Islam.

20TH CENTURY

Maiden Voyages: Women and the Golden Age of Transatlantic Travel
by Siân Evans
(Two Roads, 368 pages, £25)



Setting sail

Between the world wars, countless women boarded vast ocean liners seeking adventure, or the hope of a better life, across the Atlantic. In telling their stories, Siân Evans captures the glamour of life on the upper decks (think dance bands, evening gowns and illicit romances with millionaires), alongside the desperation and discomfort of those who gambled everything on a one-way ticket in steerage.

SOCIAL HISTORY

The Haunting of Alma Fielding
by Kate Summerscale
(Bloomsbury, 352 pages, £18.99)

Supernatural suburbia

In 1938, London housewife Alma Fielding was plagued by a poltergeist. Tea cups smashed in mid-air, jewellery materialised from nowhere, and trinkets flung themselves across the room. And when psychical researcher Nandor Fodor began to investigate, things got even stranger. Delving into Alma's case, the *Suspicions of Mr Whicher* author unravels a strange tale of paranoia and psychological trauma.

SOCIAL

Metropolis: A History of Humanity's Greatest Invention
by Ben Wilson
(Jonathan Cape, 448 pages, £25)

Urban sprawl

As Ben Wilson notes, cities have historically been home to only a sliver of the world's population – yet in the 21st century, urban centres grow by an estimated 200,000 people every day. Exploring the factors behind this meteoric rise, and journeying from ancient Babylon to present-day Lagos along the way, this is a fascinating look at the highs and lows of inner-city living, from skyscrapers to slums.

POLITICAL

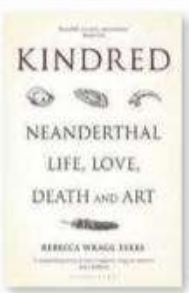
Revolutions
edited by Peter Furtado
(Thames & Hudson,
368 pages, £24.95)

Power struggles

What sparks revolution? How long-lasting are the changes such uprisings bring about – and what are their real legacies, decades on? Those are the questions at the heart of this edited collection, which explores examples such as the 17th-century deposition of James II and VII and the 1917 Russian Revolution. From Cuba to Iran, it's a diverse, global collection, with timelines and profiles of key figures.

PREHISTORY

Kindred: Neanderthal Life, Love, Death and Art
by Rebecca Wragg Sykes
(Bloomsbury Sigma, 400 pages, £20)

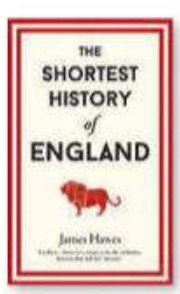


Distant cousins

Perhaps because they're us, only not quite – humans, but not Homo sapiens – Neanderthals retain something of an enigmatic allure. This book draws on the latest scholarship to bring them into sharper focus: how they adapted to their changing world, where they called home, and how they made sense of their lives. It's an accessible, elegantly written look at life on Earth hundreds of thousands of years ago.

POLITICAL

The Shortest History of England
by James Hawes
(Old Street Publishing,
288 pages, £12.99)



Little England

This canter through centuries of England's history ranges from Britannia to Brexit in fewer than 300 pages. It's peppered with images, infographics and quotes, and if its design never allows it to pause in any one place for very long, it does provide an authored sketch of the nation's history. This is a story of long-standing divisions, and of elites struggling to control the masses. H

LISTEN

Northern vistas

The Scandinavian nations of Denmark, Sweden and Norway are liberal democracies in which taxes are high but the welfare state is generous. They are also countries with a reputation for being, no matter what their crime fiction may suggest, a bit boring – to the extent of outsiders finding them difficult to tell apart.

Not true, say Misha Glenny and Miles Warde, as they chart the region's history for a new three-part series exploring why the countries are the way they are – and which also tries to explain the Swedish exceptionalism evident in its approach to Covid-19.

As if to shake off any lingering idea that Scandinavia's history may be beige, he begins with the Stockholm Bloodbath of 1520, in which the Danish king Christian II attempted to kill off the Swedish aristocracy as a way to maintain control over the country. It didn't work, however, and Sweden would become a military superpower which was so feared that German parents still tell their children: "If you don't behave, the Swedes will come and get you."

In contrast, the story of Denmark is one of managed decline, a once-powerful nation learning that small can be beautiful. Glenny concludes with Norway, which has only been independent since 1905, yet is often ranked as the best place in the world to live.

The Invention of Scandinavia
BBC Radio 4 / Expected to air Tuesday 10 November

ALAMY

ENCOUNTERS

86 DIARY: LISTEN / WATCH / TASTE
By **Jonathan Wright**, **Samantha Nott** and **Matt Elton**
92 EXPLORE... Merchant Adventurers' Hall, York

Scandi drama
Nyhavn harbour in the Danish capital of Copenhagen. A new radio documentary explores the contrasting fortunes of Scandinavian nations

LISTEN

Visions of Albion

Broadcaster and DJ Zakia Sewell (pictured) doesn't much like national symbols that evoke memories of British colonialism. But she is fascinated by a place called Albion, which represents a distant, mythical, utopian, pre-empire past. Key to this was seeing folk-jazz band Pentangle as a teenager and finding herself drawn to the very English mysticism that she found in the band's music.

Over four episodes, Sewell's new Radio 4 series considers the idea of Albion and what it has to offer us today. It takes in Anglo-Saxon ideas of Albion, the relationship between Britain and countries in the Caribbean, and why there are some who want to exclude people who look like Sewell from their personal visions of Albion.

Zakia Sewell's Albion
BBC Radio 4 / Expected to air Tuesday 17 November

Joshua Caleb Johnson and Ethan Hawke star in a TV adaptation of the 2013 novel *The Good Lord Bird*

WATCH

Maverick cowboy

In October 1859, abolitionist John Brown attempted to initiate a revolt of enslaved people in the American South by taking over the Harpers Ferry Armory in Virginia. Brown's efforts failed, but he remains a fascinating figure, which in great part explains why James McBride made him the subject of his award-winning 2013 novel, *The Good Lord Bird*.

That book has now been brought to the screen, with Ethan Hawke as Brown, a man whose life we see from the point of view of Henry 'Onion' Shackleford (Joshua Caleb Johnson), an enslaved teenager whom Brown mistakes for a girl.

This miniseries tells a story that's as tragic as it is sometimes absurd and features a phenomenal performance from Hawke.

The Good Lord Bird
Sky Atlantic / November

Residents of devastated postwar Berlin check noticeboards for news, 1945. A new TV series tells the story of how a ruined city began to rebuild

WATCH

A city under siege

In the wake of the Second World War, Germany's capital, Berlin, lay in ruins. The battle for the city had raged for two weeks in late spring 1945, resulting in a great deal of death and destruction. With Nazi Germany's defeat came occupation by the Red Army and, doing much to determine the city's divided future, the Potsdam Conference of July and August 1945.

What was it like to live in Berlin during 1945, a momentous year? This German-produced series gathers eyewitness testimonies from Soviet, American, British and French soldiers, as well as a German population that, at the beginning of 1945, largely had little inkling of the horrors that lay ahead.

Berlin: 1945
BBC Four / November

GETTY IMAGES/BBC/SKY ATLANTIC

The mysterious fate of Edward V and his brother, Richard, is explored in our new podcast series

LISTEN

Towering intrigue

In 1483, two young boys – heirs to the English throne – vanished in the Tower of London. For more than 500 years, the mystery of what happened to the princes has never been solved. Our new documentary-style podcast series, presented by Ellie Cawthorne, delves into the different theories about their fate: were they murdered, or could the boys have survived?

Five historians, including Nathen Amin and Lauren Johnson, give their verdicts, exposing a tangled web of shadowy characters, brutal political dealings and murky motivations over the course of the eight episodes. While Richard III, the boys' uncle, has most commonly been blamed for their deaths, the historical evidence is far from clear-cut. All of this means a tantalising range of alternative scenarios are open for debate.

The Princes in the Tower: A Medieval Murder Mystery
historyextra.com/princes / Available now

WEEKLY TV & RADIO
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BBC

HISTORY ON THE BOX

"Carrying out a successful revolution means seizing control of the story and making sure your version triumphs"

Historian and broadcaster **LUCY WORSLEY** tells us about the return of her series separating historical fact from fib – and why the focus is placed on revolt and rebellion in Britain, France and Russia

The linking theme of the new run of *History's Biggest Fibs* is revolutions. Why did you choose that focus?
If the series were a university course, we would be calling it 'historiography' – it's concerned with the changing interpretation of history. That word has become 'fibs', a shorthand we have used for quite a few different programmes now.

We decided to look at revolutions because they are fantastic causes of fibs or changing interpretations. To carry out a successful revolution means seizing control of the story and making sure your version triumphs over others.

The stories that you explore – the French Revolution, the Regency era and the Russian Revolution – link in unexpected ways, don't they?
It's amazing to see, for example, what Lenin made of the French Revolution, and how he learned from the mistakes [he thought] it had made. He saw the way in which Terror ate itself in the end in the 1790s, and he wanted to maintain that pure spirit of revolution.

The reason we chose the Regency period is because it was so nearly a revolution – and yet it wasn't. The argument we make is that the seeds of future revolutions were sown in an age of which people often think: "Oh, it was dancing and balls, and going to the beautiful Georgian city of Bath and having tea."

What do you make of Marie Antoinette and her role in the French Revolution?
Poor Marie Antoinette. She is one of those people in history towards whom I feel a sense of wrongs that must be righted. The fact that she was female and foreign [she was Austrian] made her the perfect scapegoat. I'm not going to say the revolution has nothing to do with her, because perception is important in the creation of the cauldrons in which revolutions are boiled, but she still bears far too much stigma when there [were factors at play such as] huge national debt, irrespective of what she did.

You talk about the French Revolution as a bourgeois revolution.
Yes, and the same again with the Russian Revolution. And the reason that Peterloo [1819] didn't lead to revolution is the middle classes basically stayed onside with the regime. With 1917, we look at the ways that in our minds, the two revolutions that year get smidged into one. There was the first revolution in February and that had loads of middle-class people taking part in it. Only in October do we get the Bolshevik Revolution, which afterwards, *obviously*, Lenin and the Bolsheviks bigged up into the really important one. H

Royal History's Biggest Fibs with Lucy Worsley will be broadcast on BBC Two in November. Turn to page 66 for our feature on the Regency era

Lucy Worsley dressed as George IV – whose reign was marked by unrest

TASTE

Devonshire squab pie

This traditional pie from the south-west of England takes its name from the young pigeon that would originally have been used as filling. However, the version we've plumped for here – lamb and apples – is known to have been used as one of the many alternatives from at least the middle of the 18th century onward.

Difficulty: 3/10
Preparation time: 20 minutes
Baking time: One hour

INGREDIENTS

450g cubed lamb
150ml lamb stock
One onion, sliced
One red apple, thinly sliced
Eight ready-to-eat prunes
350g ready-to-roll short-crust pastry
One egg, beaten
Half a teaspoon each of ground cinnamon and ground mace
A pinch of ground nutmeg
2 tsp of cornflour
2 tsp of light brown sugar
Salt and pepper

METHOD

1. Mix the lamb with the spices, salt and pepper, and cornflour.
2. In an ovenproof pie dish, layer the lamb with the apple and onions, pop in the prunes and add the sugar and stock.
3. Roll out the pastry and use to top the pie, crimping the edges.
4. Brush with the beaten egg and bake for an hour at 170°C until golden brown.

Recipe by Taste Buds magazine: bit.ly/3jFd3oe

Despite their name, these meaty, fruity West Country pies are pigeon-free

A depiction of a 'hungry ghost', a being from Chinese religion with unresolved emotional needs. A new series charts how the supernatural reflects society

LISTEN

Spectres from the past

As the nights draw in, it's time to tell spooky tales – or even, as a new radio series presented by writer Kirsty Logan invites us to do, explore the history of ghost stories. The show's central idea is that the evolution of 'ghostlore' down the centuries has much to tell us about different societies, cultures and times.

The 10-part series starts with stories dating back to the world's earliest civilisations. We learn that decorated bones in early grave sites attest to our ancestors' belief in the afterlife, as do letters to the dead written in ancient Egyptian times and stories of predatory Chindi from North America.

Viking tales, too, exert an influence, and likely provided a template for the medieval English Revenant, a malevolent ghost made of flesh and blood, rather than a spectral figure. Logan also considers the place of ghosts within the Abrahamic faiths, in great part as a way to explore why stories of spectres are missing from Islam.

In other episodes, Logan tackles Chinese ghost stories, the repression of ghost stories shared by African-American slaves, and grief apparitions – visions of deceased loved ones. It's all recorded in binaural audio, the better for Logan to whisper in listeners' ears. (There will be extra material on the podcast version of the series.)

A Natural History of Ghosts
BBC Radio 4 & BBC Sounds / Airing now

BRIDGEMAN/TASTE BUDS MAGAZINE

LISTEN

National anthems

Britain has long had a love-hate relationship with opera, an artform as revered by its aficionados as it is treated with suspicion by others. Perhaps that in part explains why British composers, trying to connect with a wider audience, have so often striven to create music that tells us about ourselves.

It's an idea explored by British baritone and composer Roderick Williams in a three-part series that begins in the 18th century with Handel, a German composer that Georgian Britain took to its heart – *after* he began serving up operas in English. The series also looks in depth at the work of Gilbert and Sullivan, and Benjamin Britten.

Britain in 10 Operas
BBC Radio 4 / November

Roderick Williams stars in Benjamin Britten's 1951 opera, *Billy Budd*. A new radio documentary explores how operas have reflected wider societal concerns

WATCH

Women in charge

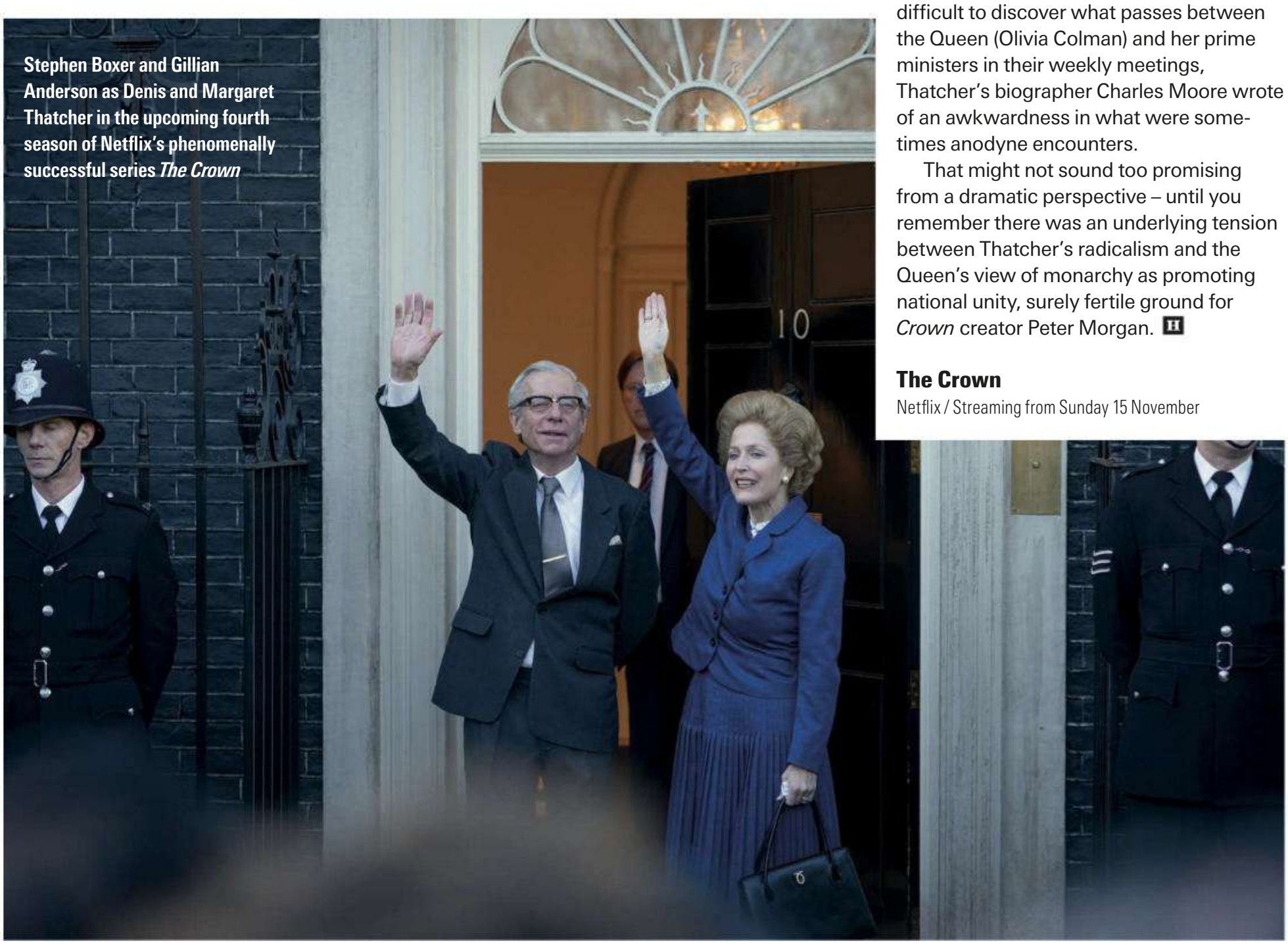
One of the consistently remarkable things about *The Crown* is the way it dramatises and illuminates the recent past without ever sensationalising the lives of the Windsors. That subtlety will be more needed than ever as the fourth season reaches the late 1970s and, with Prince Charles (Josh O'Connor) turning 30, the question of ensuring the succession preoccupies the palace.

Enter a young Lady Diana Spencer (Emma Corrin) and, as seen from the outside at least, a fairytale romance that in July 1981 culminated in the 'wedding of the century'. The episode revisiting the big day should be spectacular, especially as *The Crown*'s production team was able to recreate Diana's wedding dress using original patterns supplied by designers David and Elizabeth Emanuel.

There's another significant addition to the cast: Gillian Anderson, who portrays Margaret Thatcher, the Conservative leader who reshaped Britain's politics and economy in the 1980s. While it's famously difficult to discover what passes between the Queen (Olivia Colman) and her prime ministers in their weekly meetings, Thatcher's biographer Charles Moore wrote of an awkwardness in what were sometimes anodyne encounters.

That might not sound too promising from a dramatic perspective – until you remember there was an underlying tension between Thatcher's radicalism and the Queen's view of monarchy as promoting national unity, surely fertile ground for *Crown* creator Peter Morgan. H

The Crown
Netflix / Streaming from Sunday 15 November



Stephen Boxer and Gillian Anderson as Denis and Margaret Thatcher in the upcoming fourth season of Netflix's phenomenally successful series *The Crown*

NETFLIX/CLIVE BARDA–OPERA NORTH

The merchant hall built on religious foundations

York's Merchant Adventurers' Hall was built by the city's rich medieval merchants – but not just to line their pockets. **EMMA J WELLS** explores how their fervent religious beliefs shaped the hall's history

Along the bustling Fossgate in York, an ornate gateway stands out among the shops and restaurants. The brick gatehouse, crowned by an elaborate Dutch gable, and with a painted carving and 'Merchants Hall' emblazoned above its russet door, gives a taste of what awaits those who pass through it.

The gatehouse's central passage opens out to the very embodiment of 'Merrie Olde England'. Pale yellow walls interlaced with black timbers convey the quintessential charm of the largest timber-framed structure in York. The grand 14th-century building is the guildhall of the buyers and exporters of woollen cloth – whose riches much of medieval England was built on – known as the Merchant Adventurers.

The year was 1356. A hunk of prime real estate lay empty on the banks of the river Foss and caught the attention of three local merchants: John Freboys, John Crome and Robert Smeton. A deal for its purchase was brokered, and in 1357 the land became home to the Fraternity of Our Lord Jesus Christ and the Blessed Virgin Mary (the predecessor of the current Company of Merchant Adventurers). Ground was broken on the construction of a new hall to house the fraternity soon after. Trinity Hall, as it was then known, was completed within roughly four years. Though prone to flooding (and sadly it still is), the hall's proximity to the river Foss, an economic vitaliser, was ideal for these international trading capitalists. But at the heart of this structure was 13 businessmen's devotion to religion – and their desire for a grand space in which their compatriots could assemble.

> **"Members accessed the hall's chapel through a hospital and walked among its ailing patients"**

Brick from the Carmelite Friars and oak-timbered beams from Thorpe Underwood were shaped, scraped and hewn into the impressive double-aisled great hall on the first floor where, for more than 650 years, dialogues on trade, politics, worship and charity were pored over. And hidden within the carpentry, an implicit set of 'rules' enforced one's place and actions. The use of quality ornate timber towards the dais (higher) end meant guests and guildsmen never stepped out of line, as those of lower station were reminded where not to cross.

Protecting the poor

The undercroft, encased in creamy magnesian limestone, red brick and rose tiles, was an almshouse that offered spiritual and physical aid to its few permanent residents. Tacked to the side was the hall's chapel. Accessed via the hospital (ie the undercroft, which was licensed as such in 1373), members walked among patients – a reminder that corporal works of mercy in this life were crucial to a heavenly experience in the next.

In 1430 the merchants were granted a charter by Henry VI, formally incorporating them as a guild, alongside the religious fraternity. But their prosperity was short-lived. As mercantile technology flourished and ships grew ever larger, York's slender waterways, once its lifeline, became its demise. London increasingly monopolised the manufacture and export of English cloth, while York's tailed off, ending an era in the north.

Today, the company is no longer a trading association but holds the hall in trust. More than six centuries after it was constructed, its unbroken history of religion, charity and fraternity continues to enhance the the civic and business life of York. H

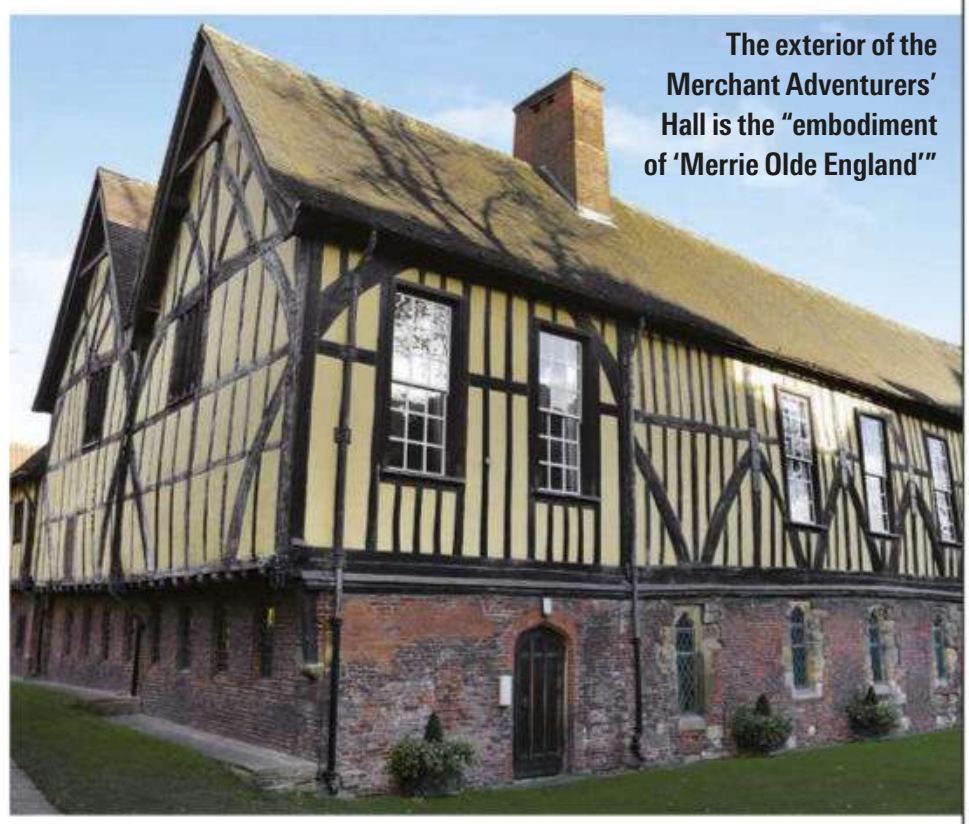
Emma J Wells is a lecturer in ecclesiastical and architectural history at the University of York

VISIT For more information on the Merchant Adventurers' Hall, go to **merchantshallyork.org/visit**

DREAMSTIME/ALAMY

Grand meeting place
The handsome interior of the great hall, which was used by medieval merchants as a space for both business and social affairs

LEFT: The Fossgate entrance to the hall, topped with an impressive coat of arms
ABOVE: The hall's spacious undercroft, which until 1900 was used as an almshouse that offered spiritual and physical aid to the sick and poverty-stricken of York



The exterior of the Merchant Adventurers' Hall is the "embodiment of 'Merrie Olde England'"

ADVERTISEMENT FEATURE

Historic DAYS OUT

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Canterbury Cathedral

Discover England's First Cathedral. UNESCO World Heritage Site, seat of the Archbishop of Canterbury, and resting place of saints and royalty, Canterbury Cathedral's thrilling history spans over 1,400 years, telling the stories that have shaped England. From stunning stained glass and architecture to large open grounds, there's plenty to explore.

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Blackwell – The Arts & Crafts House

Blackwell is a rare architectural gem, and a perfectly preserved snapshot of early 20th-century living, located in Bowness-on-Windermere in the heart of the Lake District National Park. A stunning Grade I listed building, and one of the UK's finest examples of Arts & Crafts architecture, Blackwell has remarkable views and a tranquil setting that never fail to inspire.

01539 446139 | blackwell.org.uk

Ditchling Museum of Art + Craft

Set at the foot of the beautiful South Downs National Park, Ditchling Museum of Art + Craft offers a great day out for the whole family. Discover the fascinating story of the small village that became a hub for the Arts and Crafts movement in the early 20th century.

01273 844744 | ditchlingmuseumartcraft.org.uk

Tamworth Castle & Grounds

Tamworth Castle is a stunning example of an intact Norman motte and bailey castle, surrounded by beautiful grounds. Explore 900 years of history and uncover the secrets inside. From 2021, learn about Tamworth as an Anglo-Saxon seat of royal power with a new exhibition including mead hall, Staffordshire Hoard items and the story of Lady Aethelflaed.

01827 709618 | tamworthcastle.co.uk

Herschel Museum of Astronomy

Exclusive access to the home where William and Caroline Herschel lived, find out about their lives and scientific discoveries with self-led visits or guided tours. Look out for regular stargazing events, with telescopes placed in the garden on the very spot the planet Uranus was discovered, perfect for exploring the skies.

01225 446 865 | herschelmuseum.org.uk

Picton Castle

Set in the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park and surrounded by a spectacular 40 acre garden, Picton Castle originated in the 13th century, with a splendid Georgian wing added in the 1790s. A treasured family home for over 700 years, the elegant rooms feature opulent French furnishings, magnificent fireplaces and fine works of art.

pictoncastle.co.uk | 01437 751326

Christmas Gift Guide

The festive season is almost here and it's the perfect time to treat family and friends to something special. Here you will find a selection of options for the history lover in your life.

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This Christmas give the gift of history, humour, & distinguishment. These affordable 1800s military portraits are created to mimic actual paintings & can be created using a simple headshot. Contact HarvDesign to get yours today!

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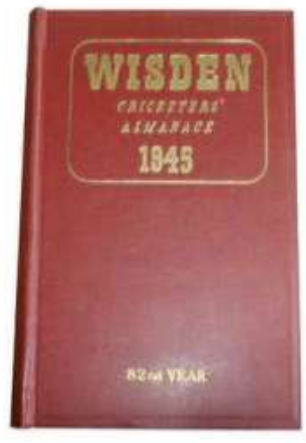

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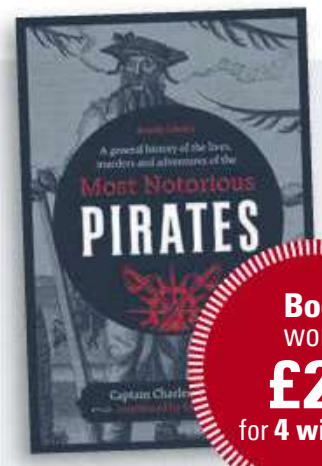


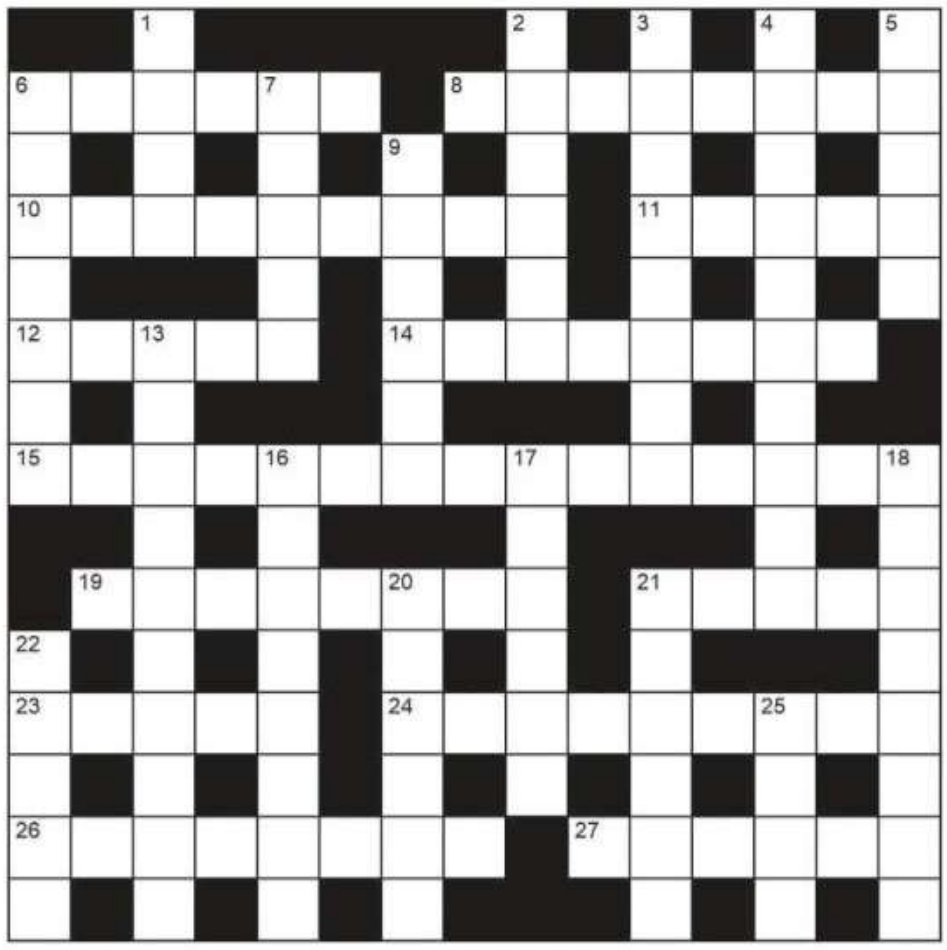
Book worth £20 for 4 winners

A General History of the Lives, Murders and Adventures of the

Most Notorious Pirates

Introduced by Sam Willis

First published in 1724, this book by Captain Charles Johnson is considered one of the most influential volumes on pirates ever written. It charts the lives of 20 bloodthirsty seafarers, including Blackbeard, Anne Bonny and Captain Kidd, all presented in a richly illustrated new edition.



Across

6 Essex village which in 1947 became one of the UK's first New Towns (6)
8/24 His assassination on 28 June 1914 had catastrophic consequences (8,9)
10 The cathedral in which Napoleon crowned himself emperor of France in 1804 (5-4)
11 Sixth-century BC ruler of Persia, founder of the Achaemenid empire, ___the Great (5)
12 Regiments of native South Africans, such as those deployed by Shaka (plural form) (5)
14 A West Country tin-mining area, granted its own jurisdiction (8)
15 First-century AD Vietnamese heroines, who led the first independence movement against the occupying Chinese (3,5,7)
19 British legislation of 1765, made unenforceable by the resistance of American colonists (5,3)
21 General whose British forces defeated the French at Quebec (1759), though he died in the battle (5)
23 First name of Russia's first popularly elected leader (5)
24 See 8 across
26 Jules ___, 19th-century French historian who is credited with coining the term 'Renaissance' (8)
27 Name of an ancient Georgian kingdom as well as a peninsula of western Europe (6)

Down

1 A legal document having its origin in an order authenticated with the seal of an Anglo-Saxon monarch (4)
2 Twentieth-century Spanish philosopher José ___ y Gasset, author of a collection of essays titled *Toward a Philosophy of History* (6)
3 A term for US-born people of Mexican descent, which, though sometimes applied pejoratively, was a symbol of pride during eg the 1960s civil rights movement (8)
4 The pseudonym under which Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* was originally published (6,4)
5/7 Black US athlete, whose 1936 Berlin Olympics successes were a big blow to Nazi 'Aryan supremacy' propaganda (5,5)
6 One of two legendary brothers said to have led the first Anglo-Saxon settlers in Britain (7)
7 See 5 down
9 Stone block used at eg Stonehenge (6)
13 The US acquired this Caribbean island as a result of the Spanish-American War (1898) (6,4)
16 One spelling of the name of several ancient Egyptian kings of the dynasty founded around 1292 BC (8)
17 Examples of this literary style include *Gulliver's Travels* and *Catch-22* (6)

Where is India's 16th-century Red Fort located? *(see 25 down)*

18 Carolyn ___, social and cultural historian of modern Britain (8)
20 First name of the Swedish chemist who invented dynamite (6)
21 English port that has associations with Captain James Cook and the horror novel *Dracula* (1897) (6)
22 The first country to test this weapon was the US, at the Pacific atoll of Enewetak in 1952 (1-4)
25 Indian location of the Red Fort, commissioned by Mughal emperor Akbar in 1565 (4)

.....

Compiled by **Eddie James**

What was Charlotte Brontë's pseudonym? *(see 4 down)*

HOW TO ENTER

● Open to residents of the UK (inc Channel Islands). Post entries to ***BBC History Magazine*, December 2020 Crossword, PO Box 501, Leicester LE94 0AA** or email them to ***december2020@historycomps.co.uk*** by 5pm on **25 November 2020**. ● Entrants must supply full name, address and phone number. The winners will be the first correct entries drawn at random after the closing time. Winners' names will appear in the January 2021 issue. By entering, participants agree to be bound by the terms and conditions shown in full in the box below. Immediate Media Company Ltd (publishers of *BBC History Magazine*) will use personal details in accordance with the Immediate Privacy Policy at *immediatemedia.co.uk/privacy-policy/privacy/* ● Immediate Media Company Ltd (publishers of *BBC History Magazine*) would love to send you newsletters, together with special offers and other promotions. If you would not like to receive these, please write 'NO INFO' on your entry. ● Branded BBC titles are licensed from or published jointly with BBC Studios (the commercial arm of the BBC). Please tick here ❑ if you'd like to receive regular newsletters, special offers and promotions from BBC Studios by email. Your information will be handled in accordance with the BBC Studios privacy policy: *bbcstudios.com/privacy. – bbc.com/editorialguidelines/guidance/code-of-conduct*

Solution to our October 2020 crossword

Across 7 Odiham 8 Catacomb 11/12 Josephine Baker 13 Range 15 Peterloo 17 Ratline 19 HMS *Onyx* 20 Erlander 22 Akbar 25 Rhine 26 Moorehead 28 Beeching 29 Ermine
Down 1 Non-jurors 2 Wilson 3 Earp 4 Talent 5 Barbarossa 6 Yorktown 9 Biro 10 Dieppe 14 Elizabeth I 16 Oxbridge 18 Terminer 19 Harrow 21 Domino 23 Brexit 24 Aruba 27 Eire

Five winners of *A History of Magic*

N Grogan, Purley; M McBrearty, Sir Benfro; M Bailey, Derbyshire; C Thomas, Wiltshire; M Fluck, Gloucestershire

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GETTY IMAGES/ALAMY

MORE FROM US

A selection of the exciting content on our website **historyextra.com**

The prime minister and the queen

Margaret Thatcher's relationship with the Queen has long fascinated their biographers. Ahead of series four of *The Crown*, Dominic Sandbrook reveals how they got along.
historyextra.com/queen-and-thatcher

Overshadowed women

To coincide with the release of *Enola Holmes*, which follows the adventures of Sherlock Holmes's younger sister, Netflix has erected statues of historical women who were overshadowed by their famous brothers. Fern Riddell explains why these women are now being celebrated.
historyextra.com/overlooked-sisters

Eight medieval turning points

Did medieval Europe have historical turning points: moments when its history could have taken a different path? Charles West selects eight events – among many – that signalled significant change across the continent.
historyextra.com/medieval-turning-points

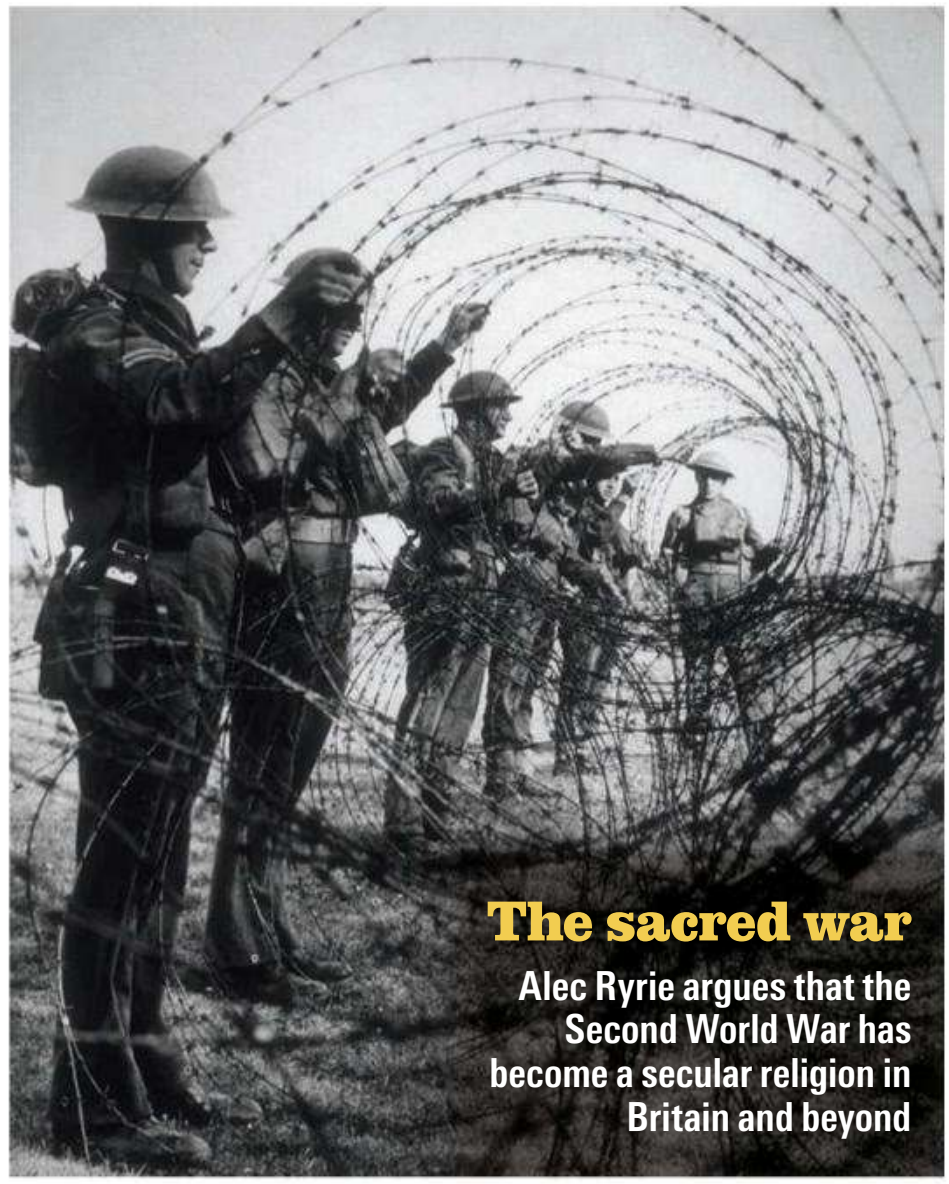
The real history behind The Spanish Princess

The drama telling the story of Catherine of Aragon, the Spanish royal who married both the teenage Tudor heir Prince Arthur and his younger brother Henry, returned to Starz in October. Discover the story behind it.
historyextra.com/spanish-princess

GETTY/ IMAGES/NETFLIX/STARZ/GETTY IMAGES/ALAMY/TATE

NEXT MONTH

Christmas issue on sale 26 November 2020



The sacred war

Alec Ryrie argues that the Second World War has become a secular religion in Britain and beyond

Radical Richard

Matt Lewis on how Richard III sought to help the common people during his brief reign

Nelson in his own words

Marianne Czisnik reveals a different side to the British naval hero through his letters to Emma Hamilton

Pregnancy cravings

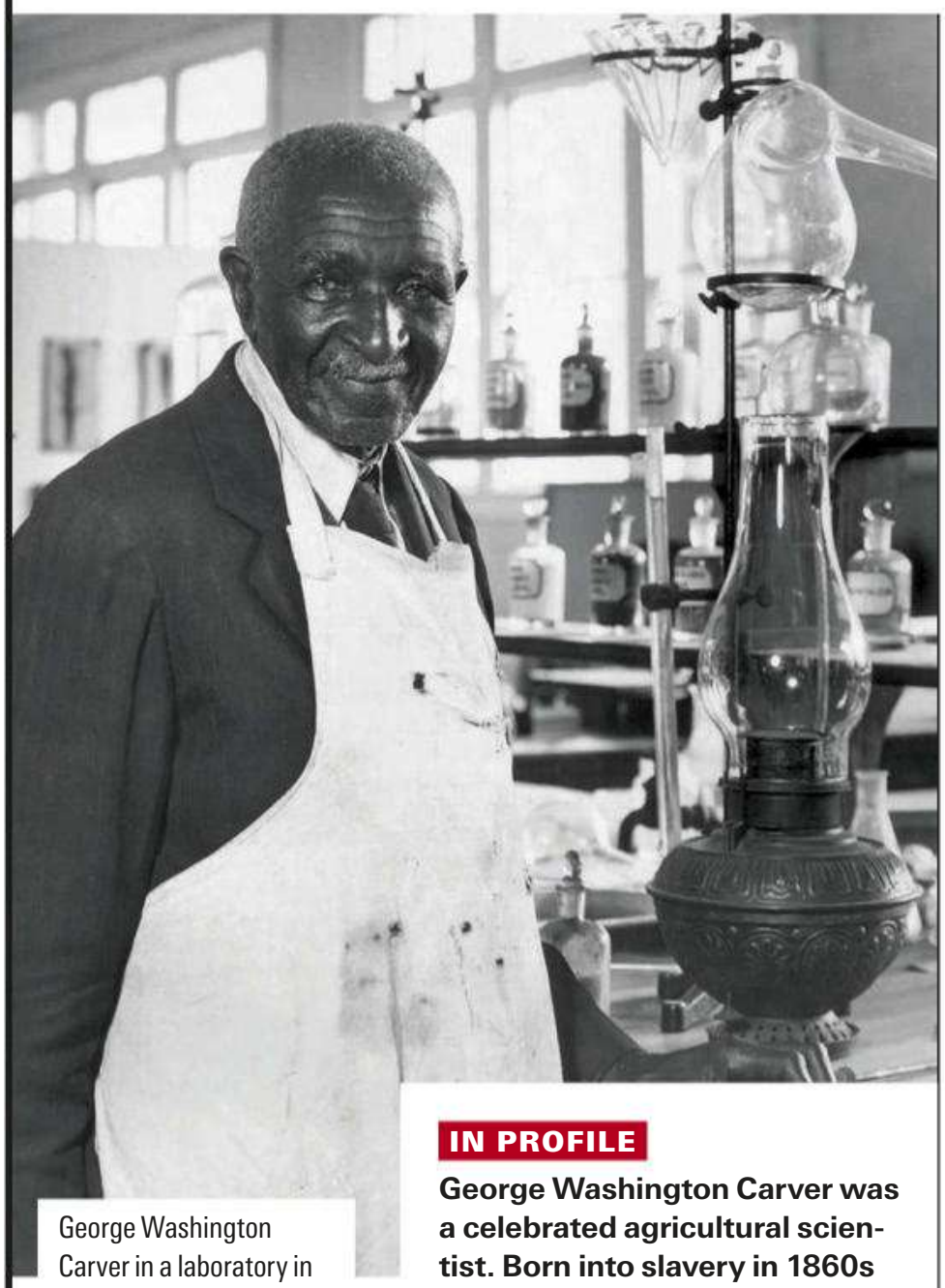
Jennifer Evans highlights unusual items expectant mothers consumed in early modern Europe

MY HISTORY HERO

Gillian Burke, scientist and television presenter, chooses

George Washington Carver

c1864–1943



George Washington Carver in a laboratory in c1935. "His appreciation of the link between soil health and human health was astounding," says Gillian Burke

IN PROFILE

George Washington Carver was a celebrated agricultural scientist. Born into slavery in 1860s Missouri, Carver developed a passion for botany which ultimately earned him a post as head of agriculture at Tuskegee Institute, Alabama. Here, his pioneering research into soil depletion transformed the lives of many poor black farmers. He died in 1943, aged around 78.

> "Carver toured the Deep South in a wagon, distributing 'how-to' pamphlets that were accessible to poor black farmers"

Gillian Burke is a scientist and producer and presenter of natural history programmes. She is co-presenting *Autumnwatch*, which airs on BBC Two from late October

When did you first hear about George Washington Carver?
I'd long known his name. But I only really began to appreciate what an amazing life he'd led a couple of years ago, when I was asked to do a talk at a school during Black History Month. I instantly found the connection he made between soil health and human health astounding. And he reminded me of my grandfather, who, despite being born in Trinidad to a freed slave, went on to become one of the first black barristers in Kenya, having studied in London in the early 1900s. As for Carver, he was born into slavery in rural Missouri but relentlessly pursued an education, and became an accomplished scientist who would transform the lives of some of America's poorest farmers.

How tough was Carver's early life?
Incredibly so. He never knew his father. Then, when he was very young, his family was kidnapped. His 'owners' raised a posse and recovered him, yet he never saw his mother again. The turning point in his life came with the determination to attend the nearest school, which was an eight-mile walk away. At a young age he developed a passion for botany and the natural world, and that passion would eventually take him to Tuskegee Institute, Alabama, as head of its agriculture department.

What made Carver a hero?
His determination to improve other people's lives. On arriving in the Deep South, Carver was quickly struck by the terrible poverty afflicting local cotton farmers. Many of them were sharecroppers, which was basically one step up from indentured labour. Their land was overworked, the soil terribly depleted – and this meant that their crops were routinely failing.

Carver's genius was to identify a solution to the problem of soil depletion, and convey that solution brilliantly. He encouraged farmers to move from cotton to other crops – such as peanuts and sweet potato – that would restore the soil's health. And to communicate the message, he toured local farms in a wagon, distributing 'how-to' pamphlets that were accessible to poor black farmers. He even handed out recipes for turning these new crops into dishes. For this, *Time* magazine dubbed him the 'Black Leonardo'.

Is there anything you don't admire about Carver?
His decision to work within the structures of white political rule, rather than fight for racial equality, has drawn criticism. Sometimes our heroes don't always do what we want them to but it's hard not to admire his resilience and determination.

Finally, if you could meet Carver, what would you ask him?
Did you find happiness? Given the horrors you experienced, how did you keep on going? H

Gillian Burke was talking to Spencer Mizen

LISTEN

In Radio 4's **Great Lives**, guests choose inspirational figures: *bbc.co.uk/programmes/b006qxsb*

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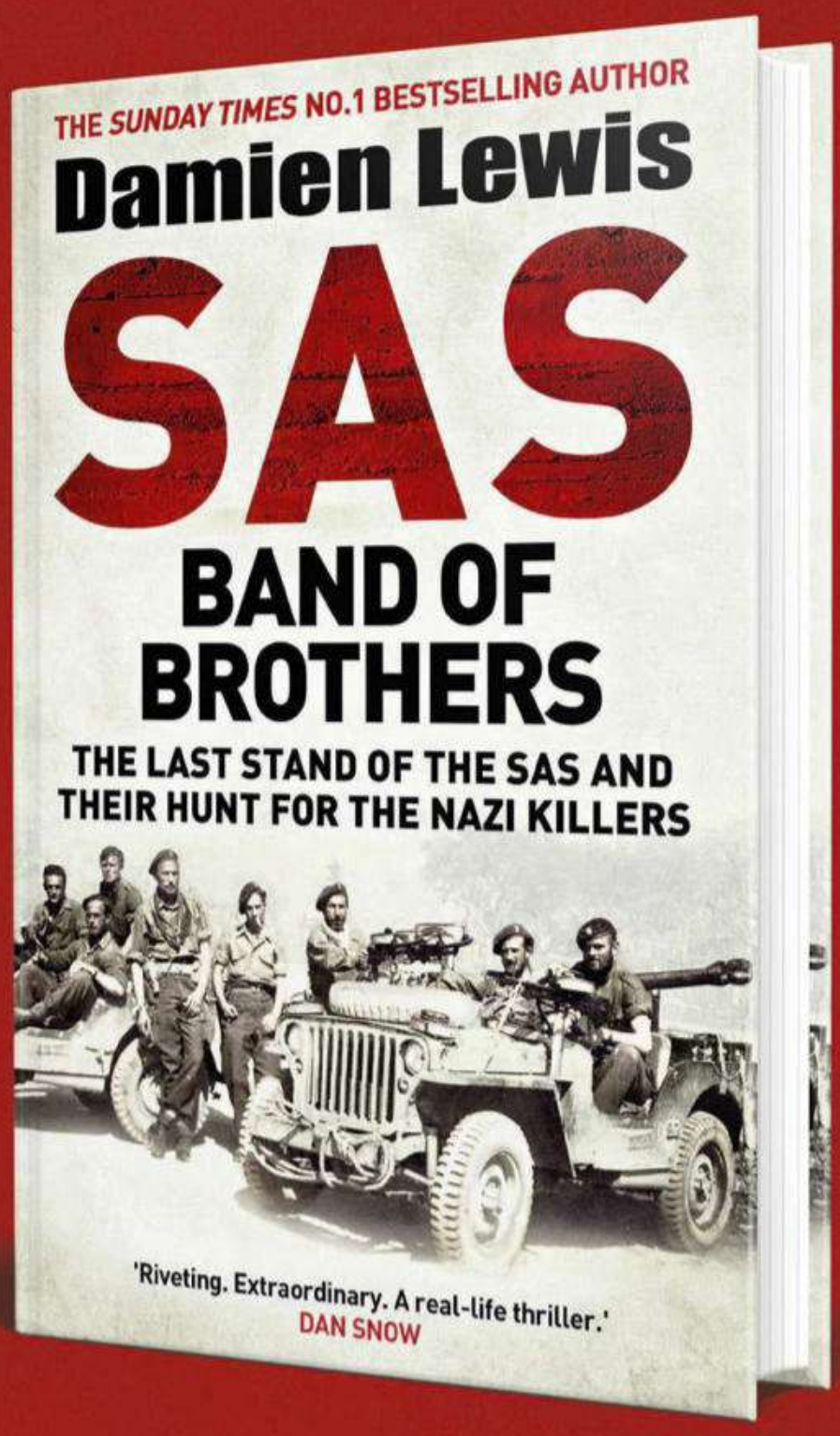
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